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THE OFFENSE OF SOCRATES: 
A RE-READING OF PLATO'S APOLOGY

EVA BRANN
St. John’s College, Annapolis

I

A first reading of Socrates' defense before the court of the Athenian people as handed down by Plato induces an exalted feeling in favor of Socrates.¹ That is my experience and, I think the experience of most students: We hear a philosopher nobly coping with a persecuting populace.

It is a perennial perception. To cite only two of the very numerous testimonials,² one from the last century and other from this: John Stuart Mill, referring to the Apology in his essay On Liberty, says that the tribunal “condemned the man who probably of all then born had deserved best of mankind, to be put to death as a criminal,” and Alfred North Whitehead asserts that Socrates died “for freedom of contemplation, and for freedom of the communication of contemplative experiences.” By and large the defenders of Socrates are to be found among those who might reasonably be called liberals, both of the thoughtful and the light-headed kind.

Now a re-reading of the speech can check this first feeling and raise suspicions which subsequent readings confirm. I am taken aback by the intransigence with which Socrates is shown to go on the offensive and to convert his defense before the court of the Heliaea into accusation against the “men of Athens.” A small formality sets the tone: he never once accords the court the customary address of “Judges;” he reserves it for those who vote for his acquittal (40a).

What is more, the speech intensifies in provocation toward its end. In that section, delivered after conviction, where Socrates avails himself of the opportunity granted by Athenian law for proposing a penalty to counter that demanded by the prosecution, he first suggests maintenance at the public table for himself, so that he might have more leisure for exhorting the Athenians, next a derisory fine about equivalent to a prisoner's ransom, and only finally, urged by Plato, Crito and other friends, a reluctantly reasonable sum thirty times as great. As a foreseeable consequence eighty juror-judges,
evidently convinced that this Socrates, once convicted, must be executed, now vote for the death penalty (Diogenes Laertius II, 42). And yet later, after judgment, when Socrates is allowed to speak once more, he issues dark threats against the city through its children (39d).

This perspective on the event, resistant to Socrates’ cause as it is, also has a lineage of testimony. Its sources vary, for the most part, from respectably conservative through illiberal, even to reactionary—from Jacob Burckhardt who calls Socrates “the gravedigger of the Attic city,” through Nietzsche and Sorel, to the Nazi writer Alfred Rosenberg, who regards his defense as an intimation of the degeneration of Greece. This rough division of views will have a certain bearing on what I have to say.

But the variety and bulk of comment concerning the Apology is itself significant. It shows how unlikely it is that I could hope to say anything new or anything binding, the more so since the one discovery which might really startle us—what Socrates did in fact say—is totally beyond our reach, as it was even beyond that of a contemporary like Xenophon. In his own Apology, which both counters and complements the Platonic version, he calls all current accounts of Socrates’ speech deficient (para. 1) and says that the only aspect on which all agree is its “grandeur of utterance.” So we are thrown back on the consideration and re-consideration of the major version, Plato’s—which is undoubtedly what Plato intended.

II

I can see two lesser and one prime reason for undertaking this effort. The first of the weaker reasons lies in the special position which the Apology occupies in Plato’s Socratic works. It is the only speech among them; the auditors participate only by shouting, and its single interlocutor, the reluctant witness Meletos, is impressed into a dialogue. It is the only work in which the author, who is explicitly absent even at Socrates’ death (Phaedo 59b), reports himself present, a fact Xenophon omits. I understand these circumstances to indicate that what Socrates said and did here is to be seen as casting its shadow over the other works, including those preceding the trial in dramatic date. I mean not only the dialogues explicitly associated with the Apology, namely its prologue, Socrates’ conversa-
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tion about piety with Euthyphro; its complement, about patriotism, with Crito; and its consummation, on death, with Phaedo and others. Nor am I particularly referring to the works which contain clear allusions to the trial, such as Anytos' threats in the Meno (94e) or the prediction of the philosopher's death in the Republic (517a). Rather all Platonic conversations, even those at which Socrates is absent, are colored by his defense—in just what way is the question to be discussed.

III

A second reason for attending to the Apology is that it belongs to a group of works which I would hesitate to call a literary genre because of the solemnity of their occasion, but whose subject does form a topic in moral education. They are the accounts of the trials of men who have offended the authorities by thinking or speaking, but not by doing anything in the gross sense. For example, two days before his conviction for high treason and less than two weeks before his execution, Helmut von Moltke wrote a letter to his wife reporting on his trial before the National Socialist People's Court. In the letter, which was smuggled out of prison, he said: "We are cleared of every practical action; we are to be hanged because we thought together." He goes on to praise the otherwise despicable judge for his clarity of perception in this respect.

Anyone who dies for his deeds also finally dies for his thought. But what distinguishes these deaths for thinking and speaking alone, attended by no provable intention to incite particular action, is the acute form they give to the question concerning the work of thought in the world.

IV

First among these comparable accounts stand those of the trial of Jesus. There is, in fact, a very long tradition setting Socrates' and Jesus' ordeals side by side: it is done, to name a small selection, in the writings of Origen, Calvin, Rousseau, Hegel and Ghandi.

The apparent similarities begin with the very fact that there are varying accounts of what was said and done. As for the defendants themselves, both are the objects of popular passion channelled by a
group of implacable opponents, led respectively by Anytus for the re-established democracy and Caiaphas for the Sanhedrin. Both are attended by a band of adherents, friends or disciples, to whom they are suspected of imparting secret teachings, and both deny the charge. Both are intransigent in their refusal to defend themselves effectively. Both show a shocking unwillingness to evade death, and for both, their deaths only confirm their influence. A most striking parallel, furthermore, is the chief explicit charge, irreverence in Socrates' and blasphemy in Jesus' case.

It is at this point also, however, that the utter incommensurability of the two cases begins to appear. Jesus “holds his peace” before the Sanhedrin and answers Pilate with “never a word” (Matthew 26,63; 27,14; a divergent account lets him answer with counter-questions and evasions). His silence arises from his situation. He is suspected of claiming the power and being of the Messiah. That claim is undeniably blasphemy if it is false. But the Jewish court has already prejudged its falsity, and since Jesus has certainly asserted the claim in secret (16,15-20), his only course is to obscure its assertion publicly. Again, when the Jewish authorities represent him to the Roman governor as seditious because he has assumed for himself a new sovereignty, Jesus follows a similar course; he admits and at the same time denies this assumption by putting it in the mouth of the governor—“Thou sayest it” (27,11), and by denying that his rule is political—“My kingdom is not of this world” (John 36).

So far there might still be a parallel between him and Socrates, for both withhold themselves from the court; both present themselves as less than they are. But there is this all-important difference: The writers of the Gospels believed, after all, that Jesus' claim was true; that the defendant at this trial was, acknowledged or not, God.

So while both cases are the consequence of an irruption into the community of powerful claims incompatible with its authority, they are quite incomparable in a way very revealing for the Apology. For Jesus, as the long-awaited Christ, is represented as fulfilling in his life and death a prophecy and a mission, while Socrates, who specifically denies having even super-human wisdom (20e), is a man, and a man unheralded and unordained. Therefore, while the Passion is an inevitable consummation, Socrates' end is no part of a prefigured unique drama but a deliberate, human deed. It is consonant with this difference that Socrates speaks where Jesus is silent, and speaks boldly, if selectively, to his city, in this world. The Apology is part of a thoroughly political event.

V

There is, however, another trial which is more permissibly comparable. Sir Thomas More, “our noble, new Christian Socrates,” as his biographer Harpsfield calls him, was brought before the King's Bench, indicted on a statute which made it treason to deny, or, in the court's interpretation, to refuse to affirm, the King as Supreme Head of the Church of England.

Socrates' and More's conduct are similar in these points: Both have an opportunity for evading their trials as well as their sentences, Socrates by voluntary silence or exile, More by offering to “revoke and reform” his “wilful obstinate opinion.” Both defend themselves before the court and both speak again, more bluntly and intransigently, after having been pronounced guilty, both revealing that they consider the real cause to be other than the stated indictment, but also that they are in spirit, at least, guilty as charged. Finally, both explain their conduct by reference to other-worldly considerations, More to “the hazarding of my soul to perpetual damnation,” Socrates to his welcome among the heroes in Hades.

But: More makes a wily, subtle defense, standing on the letter of the law in claiming his right to silence, and revealing only after the verdict his implacable opposition to the king's heterodoxy. He says: ye must understand that, in things touching conscience, every true and good subject is more bound to have respect to his said conscience and to his soul than to any other thing in all the world besides, namely, when his conscience is in such a sort as mine is, that is to say, when the person giveth no occasion of slander, of tumult and sedition against his prince, as it is with me; for I assure you that I have not hitherto to this hour disclosed and opened my conscience and mind to any person living in all the world.5

More, then, as a statesman and a lawyer defends himself with all legal care, while as a subject and a Christian he, as did Jesus, preserves inviolate his inmost thoughts. But Socrates, a private man who has never held office and has, he claims, no experience of courts (17d), handles his defense very cavalierly, while as a citizen and a philosopher he, unlike his Christian counterpart, has no notion of
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privacies of conscience. The comparison therefore throws into relief his freedom in the *Apology*. His resolve derives from no hidden recesses of conviction, but from a ground which by its very nature is common and in need of communication.

VI

The most vivid reason, finally, for re-studying the *Apology* is the desire to come to some answer to the question: Was Socrates rightly convicted and rightly condemned to death? It is a question of several aspects.

First, why did the Heliastic court convict Socrates and in addition accept the prosecution's view that this was a capital case? It is essential here to recall that Socrates himself not only considers irreverence and corruption of the young definable offenses and agrees with the authorities that such charges could lie, but that, as the *Crito* shows, he is in deepest accord with the Solonic fundamental law from which they arise.6

Now in the absence of the case for the prosecution, this first question can only be resolved by examining Socrates' defense, which I want to do later. That task is, however, complicated by the fact that Socrates turns his defense into an *offense*, into an accusation against his accusers and his fellow citizens. For it would be ludicrous to attempt to examine the substance of his attack, which would mean trying to determine whether it is more true of the Athenians that they are sluggish in self-examination than of, say, Thebans, Spartans, or Americans. Indeed, it might be argued that charges which are universally true of all humankind are, when pointedly levelled at one particular community, pernicious; hence his very attack might become evidence to the jury of his bad faith.

A second aspect of the question concerning Socrates' conviction is this. Shortly after Socrates' execution a backlash seems to have occurred. Meletos may have been condemned to death and Anytos to exile.7 Socrates the persecuted philosopher was vindicated in the repentant city. How then ought a Heliastic juror have voted, had he been able to foresee subsequent events, particularly the most immediate result, that a convicted Socrates would cooperate with his accusers by moving to force the court to inflict the death penalty?

But the most important aspect is the one framed in contemporary
terms: How should I be disposed in analogous present-day situations? For in spite of the fact that such cases can no longer arise with the judicial directness of the ancient city, the Socratic issue is always present when persons of more mobile intellect, more extensive education and more leisure than the people at large come into collision with the religious beliefs and moral traditions of those whom they are intent on serving.

VII

To begin with, then, I must examine the sufficiency of Socrates’ defense.

Xenophon takes Socrates’ “grandness of utterance,” a feature present in all previous accounts of the speech, as his point of departure. This tone must, he says, appear as “rather mindless” unless it can be shown that Socrates was in fact deliberately inviting death as an escape from the decay of old age (6). Here is the classic statement in the tradition of propounding self-euthanasia as an explanation of Socrates’ strange conduct in court. For it is evident that Socrates’ defense is a deliberate failure.

Now Plato attempts to forestall Xenophon’s explanation of this striking fact in the dialogue of Socrates’ last day, the *Phaedo*. There Socrates himself argues that suicide is simply impermissible, no matter how desirable death might seem (62a). To regard Socrates as manipulating the Athenians into killing him and to confuse his welcoming acceptance of death with suicide is to trivialize the events of that day in court. Only the fact that Socrates invited conviction stands.

VIII

Let me then present a critical rehearsal of Socrates’ speech, stated in the least well-disposed terms.

Socrates begins by accusing his accusers of lying when they warn

*An immediate occasion for this essay was the textbook controversy of 1974 in Kanawha County, West Virginia. It arose from a clash between the parents whose moral and religious sensibilities were offended by some of the books assigned to their children in the public schools, and the educators in whose judgment such reading was necessary for the childrens’ intellectual development.*
the court that he is a skilled and formidable speaker. Unaccustomed as he is to public speaking he is not formidable, "unless they call him formidable who speaks the truth" (17b). This truth he will present, and indeed in the subsequent speech, "alien to the diction" of a crowd though he may be, he is complete master of the situation. He even contrives for a stretch to introduce his own dialectic mode into the proceeding, as he interrogates Meletos, a co-accuser, who is by law obliged to submit to examination. Anytos, his senior opponent, he wisely omits to call.

He attacks this inadequate young man, who, as Socrates puts it, goes running to accuse him "to the city as to his mother" (Euthyphro 2c), with an *ad hominem* argument: Meletos himself does not care about the substance of the accusation. But what weight in law can that have, supposing it were so? In any case, Socrates does not allow Meletos to answer his question—Who, then does make the young better?—in the only way Meletos and those behind him can answer it, namely by asserting that the laws, but most of all the citizens, improve the young (24-25). For in the *Meno* (92e) he had already disallowed Anytos' answer that it is the respectable citizens of the city, its gentlemen, who transmit excellence from generation to generation. Now Socrates wants Meletos to tell the court which particular person, such as a horse trainer, exercises the youth of Athens into excellence. But, of course, this is precisely what Meletos’ backers resist—the notion that their children’s formation should be in the hands of such experts.

As a part of Socrates’ wider attack on the good faith of his accusers he substitutes a charge of his own devising for the true formal indictment. In bringing his charge, he claims, Meletos trusted to an "old slander" (19a, 28b), a long-standing hatred in the city against him, which Socrates associates with Aristophanes’ comedy, *The Clouds*. But there are difficulties. Not only does he himself later refer to the high esteem in which he is held in the city, where "the opinion prevails that Socrates is something more than most men" (35a), but the relation of Aristophanes to Socrates in the *Symposium* and Plato’s veneration for the playwright make it hard to maintain that Socrates’ friends ordinarily saw that old comedy as working over nearly a quarter of a century toward his undoing.
Socrates, then, makes up a suppositious new indictment based on the *Clouds* (112, 117) which runs: “Socrates does wrong and meddles, searching into the things below the earth and into celestial things and making the worse reasoning the stronger and teaching others these very things” (19b).

By means of this re-formulation he pretends that the real charge of irreverence—which he himself recognizes as such in the *Euthyphro* (5c)—is directed at his supposed researches into the nature of heavenly bodies and similar matters. These he had, indeed, given up long ago, when still in his youth, for reasons set out in the *Phaedo* (96b). Of such matters, he plausibly argues, he no longer knows anything, nor do they any longer concern him. And yet, in that very dialogue he gives a vivid topology of the things above and below the earth (198e ff.), as he does in the *Republic* and in other conversations. Can he really in good faith argue that he has no interest in eschatology, when he makes up novel stories and private myths about the upper and lower realms—the very enterprise that disturbs the Athenians?

His chief defense, however, against the “old slander”—which is at bottom nothing but the imputation of sophistry—rests on a tale he tells (20e). Chaerephon, his crony in the *Clouds*, had perpetrated a coup in Delphi: He had gotten Apollo’s oracle to declare that no man was wiser than Socrates. Whereupon Socrates modestly undertakes to prove the god mistaken, but, to his own regret, fails! He calls this undertaking “giving the god’s business the highest priority” (21e), and regards its mention as a sufficient defense against the old charge (24b).

X

The correct indictment, as Socrates cites it, is: “that Socrates does wrong, corrupting the young and not respecting the gods whom the city respects, but other, new half-divinities” (24b).

Here is how Socrates meets the actual charge of irreverence, when he finally reaches it. The wording of its first point, if the meaning of the verb (*nomizein*) is translated very carefully, is that Socrates “does not regard the gods in the customary way.” Against this point
Socrates has no defense—he himself admits its truth to Euthyphro. For he tells him that he, Socrates, cannot accept the traditional stories of the gods, that is, the common myths of the Greeks; this, he adds, is the reason for his prosecution (*Euthyphro*, 6a). In cross-examining Meletos, however, he traps him into thoughtlessly agreeing with an altered formulation, namely that Socrates “does not regard the gods as existing” (*nomizein einai*, 26c, d). Now he can defend himself, and he produces an argument as logical as it is ludicrous. Using the indictment itself, he argues that he who is accused of introducing new half-divinities cannot be charged with not believing in the full gods who must be their parents, any more than someone who acknowledges the existence of mules can be supposed not to believe in their parents, namely horses and asses (27c). So much for irreverence.

There remains the charge concerning the introduction of new divinities. Socrates makes it clear in the *Euthyphro* (3b) and again in the *Apology* (31d) that he understands the accusers to be thinking of his notorious *daimonion*, the “half-divine thing” within him, and that they regard him as a “maker of gods” on account of it. Nonetheless Socrates not only makes no effort to allay their apprehensions, but he even dwells more aggressively on his “divine sign” here in court than anywhere else.

*XI*

How next does Socrates defend himself against the corruption charge? His version of it in terms of the “old slander” is that Socrates is a “clever one,” the unique indigenous sophist, and ex-cogitator who dispenses dangerous wisdom to a clique from within a cogitatorium. Of course, as everyone in and out of the dialogues knows, Socrates actually has no establishment of his own, so the comic claim needs no refutation. Its serious counterpart in the real accusation, on the other hand, is that he has esoteric teachings. Socrates calls this charge a lie and asserts that no one has ever heard anything from him in private that all were not welcome to hear (33b). Had I been in that court-room I would simply have refused to believe him. Nothing is clearer than that Socrates does not say everything to everybody.

Furthermore, Socrates knows perfectly well that his accusers are
not very precise in their knowledge of this intrusive travelling tribe of professionals. In the *Meno* Anytos wanders into the conversation expressing a horror of these people, but readily confesses that he has never even met one. Socrates is in no position to ridicule him for that lack of experience. For in the *Republic* he himself argues that it might be useful for a physician to have experienced disease in his own body, but that it is in no way good for someone who is to govern the soul by means of the soul to be experienced in corruption (409a). A magistrate like Anytos might well claim that it is a staunch caution that keeps him from seeking acquaintance with those whom his sound sense makes him despise.

Since, therefore, the description of the sophists’ competence is left to Socrates, he chooses to present them as people who “might be wise with a greater than human wisdom” (20e). That is, they are the ones who are expert in the things above and below, while Socrates has the reputation only of “a certain wisdom,” which is “perhaps human wisdom.” At this point the Athenians make a disturbance, for they know that this Socratic wisdom, this “unwilling wisdom” (*Euthyphro*, 11e), has but one content: the knowledge of Socrates’ own ignorance and the determined exposition of the ignorance of everyone else in the city (21d).

Part of the charge of sophistry is the charge of “teaching.” Teaching is not in the terms of the actual indictment, but Socrates imports it and tricks Meletos into amending the wording to include it (26b). Why? Because he intends, in making the point that his activity is not teaching, to bring out these three circumstances: that he takes no money, that he conveys no subject-matter, and that he accepts no responsibility (33b).

But if he takes no money, that only means that he is uncontrollable—he cannot be engaged or dismissed, as a parent might hire or fire a professional. And if he takes no responsibility for the careers of his young associates, why, that is usually called irresponsibility. But if he conveys no positive matter to these young men, that is the very worst of all, in the light of what he shows them instead. For with disingenuous innocence he himself gives a vivid description of what is conveyed to them in his company: He goes about engaging public men, poets and craftsmen in conversations which are really examinations, in the course of which it emerges that they do not, in truth, know what they are doing, although they think they know it well.
enough—while the young men stand by and watch and smile; for, as he says charmingly: "it is not unpleasant" (33c). Afterwards, he reports, they range through the city imitating him, presumably like those skeptical puppies who have inopportuneely gotten hold of dialectic, whom he himself describes in the Republic (529b). This is what Socrates calls "not being anyone's teacher," and this is how he makes himself palatable to his fellow-citizens!

He completes his defense against the corruption charge by pointing to the fact that no one who either considers himself to have been corrupted or is a parent of a corrupted child is then and there coming forward to complain (34b). But then, of course, aside from the unlikelihood that a parent would proclaim his child's corruption in public, the whole town knew that the chief accuser Anytos considered himself to be just such a parent. Xenophon records this circumstance (Apology 29).

XII

This then is Socrates' defense as Plato permits us to construe it in the mind of a Heliastic juror. There is undoubtedly something deliberately self-incriminating about it.

Socrates does not even scruple to use phrases to the court which intimate in his own terms the equivocal nature of his own activity. I am referring to the phrases which in the Republic give the working definition of right or justice, namely "to do one's own business," and of wrongdoing, namely "to be busy at many things" (433a), to meddle, "to do everything," the latter being Socrates' favorite description of the sophists' activity (596c). Yet for Socrates in Athens the two apparently coincide—he claims that in his private interrogations he is both "doing his own business" (33a) which happens to be going about meddling in theirs (31c), and that in doing theirs he is also doing the god's (33c).

So he intimates something possibly pernicious, while he never takes cognizance of the real fears of his judges. Those fears concern the substance of the city, which is compounded of traditions, particularly the deep old myths about its gods and the established respect for the wisdom of its citizens, of whose collapse Socrates' scrutiny makes a spectacle for the young. So also, because he never acknowledges that he in fact teaches, he evades rendering a candid
and comforting account of the essential loyalty of his intentions, such as even a very unconforming citizen-teacher would feel obligated to give to apprehensive parents; he never says that he and they in the end care for the same city.

It is necessary here to recall that Socrates' indictment was judicially correct. Under these circumstances it seems to me that even a decent juror, realizing in the course of the speech that both charges had the same root, which the defense had in no way reached, might feel compelled to convict, while, as a man of foresight, he would pray that it would not come to execution.

XIII

Indeed a case can be made for the convicting Athenians. Hegel, for instance, who of course takes a very comprehensive view of the affair, is their brisk defender, and some of the points that follow are, in fact, made in the History of Philosophy (Vol. II, "The Fate of Socrates"). But what is of more interest is that they all come from the dialogues themselves.

First, the common view that this was a political trial, the attack of the rabid returned democracy against a man with aristocratic views and associates, will not hold up. Socrates himself recounts at his trial how he had been in difficulties under various regimes, certainly under the oligarchical Thirty who included his own interlocutors Critias and Charmides (32e). Furthermore, the chief accuser Anytos was a moderate democrat, a "seemingly and well-conducted man" of respectable reputation by Socrates' own account in the Meno (90b).

In fact the very description of Socrates as an anti-democrat is not very convincing. Read without prejudice, the vignette of the democratic regime in the Republic, a dialogue itself set in the democratic stronghold of Athens' harbor, shows, for all its outrageousness, one vital redeeming feature: This regime is, Socrates says, a perfect supermarket of constitutions. and anyone who wishes to erect a city, "as we are now doing," should go there (557d, cf. Statesman 303a). Socrates' activity is at home in a democracy, not to speak of the fact that the Athenians regard Socrates as instigating that very forwardness in the young which he describes as endemic to democracies (Republic, 563a).

Now the Athenians have, in fact, as Socrates himself observes in
the *Crito* (52e), borne with him for seventy years, in spite of the supposed "great hatred" against him (28a). Even his two incursions into politics, for which, as he tells the court, he might "perhaps" have died (32d), passed off safely. So that the man who tells the Athenians that they will kill anyone who publicly opposes them (31e), has himself been allowed to live a long life of semi-public resistance.

Even this late conclusion need never have come. If they had managed better, Crito sadly observes, the case need never have come to court (45e). Nor need Socrates have died, for voluntary exile was possible, as the Laws remind him when he makes them speak (52e). Even in that court and in spite of Socrates' intransigence, 220—nearly half—of the five hundred (or 501) jurors either thought the accusation insufficiently proved, or were moved by a strong sense of Socrates' excellence, or agreed with him that the city could profit by his existence, or considered that the city would be better served by forbearance. These 220 refused to find him guilty. Their number surprises Socrates, who has evidently not done justice to the well-disposed condition of some Athenians (36a).

Again, once the verdict is in, Socrates is allowed to speak freely, as is the civilized Athenian custom, and to re-affirm his partnership in the city by participating in the formulation of his sentence. Socrates abuses this occasion in order to reiterate his view of the incompetence of the Heliastic court. Moreover, once sentenced and in prison, the city of Athens allows him daily conversation with his friends and accords him a bloodless death among them. Not so in Jerusalem, London or Berlin!

Indeed his freedom to speak before the large public of the court-room or to the intimate circle of friends in prison is complete. The formal issue of a mere right to free speech, contrary to Whitehead, is of no concern to Socrates or to the Athenians; *both* care only about the substantial question of whether Socrates' speech does damage.

In this light even Anytus's harsh recommendation that the case must either not come before the court at all or come as a capital case (29c) can at least be taken to evince a state of mind the opposite of trivial, a state of mind Plato must respect. For in the *Statesman*, a dialogue dramatically contemporary with the trial (*Theatetus* 210d), the stranger to whom Socrates has turned over the conversation says
that, in the absence of true statesmanship, the laws and the ancestral customs must rule. Since, then, no one is to be wiser than they, if anyone is seen to be searching into the crafts which have been legally established, and waxing wise about them, he can be indicted on a charge of corrupting the young and made to suffer "the most extreme penalties" (299b).

In sum the very seriousness with which they take Socrates' non-political activity gives the Athenians a claim to our respect, whose modus vivendi it is to regard philosophers light-heartedly. To be sure, it is not good to interrupt a speaker, but their clamor is brief and controllable—and it comes correctly, at crucial points. Here in effect the attention of a whole city has been gained by one man, a philosopher. Of what other people can that be said?

XIV

Clearly this Socrates, who confronts and affronts such a city in this way, is Socrates in a very oblique aspect. This aspect of just that described by Kierkegaard in a passage from The Concept of Irony:8

Thus we see clearly how the position of Socrates with respect to the state is thoroughly negative, how he wholly fails to fit into it, but we see it even more clearly at the moment when, indicted for his way of life, he surely must have become conscious of his disproportion to the state. Yet undismayed he carried through his position, with his sword above his head. His speech is not the powerful pathos of enthusiasm... but instead we have an irony carried through to its last limit.

By irony Kierkegaard means not what Socrates means when he uses the term with respect to himself, namely his dissimulation, his pretense of knowing less than he does, but a kind of self-levitation by which one is raised above all positive knowledge. Such a zestful abstention from content does, in a way, characterize the Socrates of the Apology. At any rate, Socrates with his sword above his head is a man of negation, and these are his features:

XV

First and foremost there is that uncanny nay-sayer within him which he calls his daimonion, and which plays a larger role in this
than any other certainly genuine dialogue. He describes it (31d) as a sort of inner voice which has been with him from childhood; that is to say, it is innate but not in need of "recollection," of being searched out by thought. This "half-divine" and even "divine something," never aids thought and never urges action. It speaks only to warn him not to do a deed.

To what realm of being this notorious daimonion belongs is unfathomable. But the role it has in Socrates' life is not beyond conception. Enthusiasm means literally the state of having a divinity within (cf. entheos): The daimonion is Socrates' negative enthusiasm, a permanently implanted restraining power. Socrates is no enthusiast, because the exaltations of thought are not due to a special agency, though he does need a special negative faculty. For it is his chief teaching that excellence is knowledge (e.g. Protagoras 360e ff.), and that deeds of excellence are the direct consequence of knowledge. But then, by the inverse proposition, wrong deeds stem from ignorance and are always in some deep sense inadvertent; no one does bad things in full consciousness. Consequently, since they are by their very nature beyond the context of reason, they require an uncanny power for their prevention. The daimonion is Socrates' ability to avoid wrong, his negative excellence.

In particular the daimonion makes Socrates refrain from engaging in politics (31d) because that would have been tantamount, he says, to a futile, premature sort of self-destruction. Nonetheless, he describes himself in the Gorgias (521d) as being the only man in Athens who does truly engage in politics. That is to say, he has devised for himself a mode of being privately public (or the reverse); by his description it is a way of "confering in private the greatest benefit on each citizen" (36c). This mission which he has devised for himself he will not give up even if he "is to die many times over" (33c). This is Socrates' negative politics: to deny that the public realm is the truly political realm and to assert his inner logos intransigently in the service of the city. It is in this respect that Socrates most differs from Thomas More. For More unwillingly but dutifully accepts high public office, and yet asserts to his death the right to open his mind to no one but his God. It is, in capsule, the distinction in matters political between a philosopher, who cares for Being in its commonness, and a Christian who worships a Person in intimacy.
The Offense of Socrates

XVI

Last and most important, when Socrates formulates what is to be within this speech “the greatest good for man” it is in altogether negative terms: “The unexamined life is not livable for a man” (38a); what people at present care for is nothing much (30a); the truly worthwhile work is that of examining, testing, refuting, exposing impartially both oneself and others. In this one respect at least he finds himself wise: He knows he knows nothing (21d); his fellow citizens, on the other hand, fail totally under examination—and it is precisely Socrates’ offense that he publishes these failures. He claims, however, without irony, that to fall silent would be disobedience to the god (37e).

To put it another way: The first culmination of Socrates’ non-didactic teaching is usually his notorious aporia, literally “waylessness,” a profitable perplexity or embarrassment, induced in the learner for his own sake (e.g., Meno 84). Insofar as Socrates represents his activity as a public service, however, his interlocutor is embarrassed not for his own sake but as an object-lesson, nor does the conversation continue to positive learning; in this setting Socrates is indeed a negative teacher.

Here, then, the philosophic activity is presented as an entirely negative effort, without an end or a substance—significantly the substantive philosophia is never used, but only the verb philosophein, “to carry on the effort for wisdom.” But most particularly, at the literal center of the speech (29b), and again at its end, Socrates asserts his ultimate negative wisdom: his knowledge of his ignorance concerning Hades, the realm of death.

XVII

To offset clearly the negative Socrates in the dock, whose defense he appears to record, Plato writes a second defense for Socrates in prison. The conversations of the Crito and the Phaedo are the deliberately positive complements to the oratory of the Apology.

In the beginning of the Crito Socrates awakes from a deep blank sleep, just like that so longingly described at the end of the Apology, to a conversation in which he accepts his condemnation as he never would before the court, namely as duly proceeding from the laws he
Interpretation

has very willingly lived under all his life (53a). In a tone the very opposite of that in the Apology he has the laws upbraid him: "do you think the right thing is the same for you and for us, so that whatever we undertake to do to you, you think it is right to do the same back to us?" (50e).

This other, positive Socrates is even more strongly delineated in the Phaedo, the dialogue on death which contains his second and, he hopes, more successful defense (69e). On this his last day he is not a harsh and offensive rhetorician, but a charming and attentive listener, as the narrator makes a point of noting (89a). Here he speaks not as a relentless interrogator but as one who is prepared, if his interlocutor wishes it, to "talk it through in tales" (diamythologein, 70b). Here he does not present himself as proudly ignorant, but is presented as the one and only knower (76b); nor does he pretend to be without a teaching, but he rather appears as one who—the recipient of Phaedo's account interrupts to remark—makes philosophical matters astonishingly clear (102a). Here all the great Socratic notions are recapitulated: his supposition of the eide, the invisible "looks" or forms; the myth of recollection; the true good beyond the merely human good of refutation in the Apology. In this conversation Socrates frequently refers to philosophia, and presents it as the inquiry into the realm of death, the "invisible Hades" (Aides aeides) which is also the place of the invisible eide (80d), the place of being (76d). Here he is not ignorant of death but well-studied in it, and the death the city confers on him is not an absconding into sleep-like nothingness but an "immigration" to the realm of being (40c, 117c), a felicitous alternative to exile.

So, then, there can be no doubt that before the court Socrates deliberately curtails and withholds himself.

XVIII

Then the question becomes: Why? Why does Socrates deliberately offend the court, why does he go on the offensive against the Athenians, why does he use his defense to document his offense against the city?

Since Socrates actually lived and actually came before the Heliaea, there must be some aspects of Plato's Defense which derive from the actual circumstances. Once a defendant, Socrates became a resister,
the defender of philosophy from the city's attack. He must have thought that this public occasion was a moment to display spirit, to confirm the lifelong business of words in deed, to be what Achilles, to whom he compares himself, was in war, a hero for philosophy (28c).

Again, in part his conduct must have been an accommodation to the conditions of the occasion, namely the short time he has for speaking and the great crowd to whom he must address himself. Twice he mentions the lack of time for quiet persuasion (19a, 37b). This lack of leisure and of intimacy is not a peripheral matter—nothing Socrates thinks can be expeditiously conveyed by public deliverance; it must always be slowly engendered in leisurely direct conversation with its accompanying inner dialogue (see Theaetetus 172d). Socrates' positive wisdom stated concisely in public would appear simply bizarre.

The negative and the positive Socrates are the obverse of each other. Refutation, the breaking up of an accepted opinion, goes over into the search for a truth. But in public, whether Socrates has been summoned to court or has been accosted by a man who is not a friend, the transformation will not take place—the conversation is curtailed. The Apology leaves aside the widest and deepest questions concerning the right relation between the political community and the care of souls, but it implies this much: When philosophy comes upon the city it comes as a threat.

XIX

Accordingly it is possible to surmise why Plato put on record for times to come so detailed and emphatic a statement of the resistant Socrates.

A startling moment in the Apology throws light on this matter. For the first and last time Plato himself irrupts into his own work (38a). Socrates hears him raise his voice to suggest a sober and sensible money penalty, to subvert as it were, Socrates' own proud and derisory proposals. The suggestion is very much like a rebuke, and Socrates accepts it. It is as if in this work, in which Plato does not so much speak through Socrates but represents himself as spoken to by him, Plato is recording something he had heard in court which must cast its shadow over the other dialogues, and so over the whole
philosophical tradition. He has heard that Socrates' activity is publicly indefensible.

XX

Let me conjecture. The dialogues proper, the life, that is, not the letter of the Socratic conversations, would by and large pass into oblivion, as the positive content of Socrates' wisdom, its deep suppositions and encompassing myths would be shrivelled into conformity with his successors' more strenuous systems. One such successor would soon appear in Athens—Aristotle.

On the other hand, Socrates' speech, his defense delivered before the largest public of his life, would continue to be at work across the millenia. Its heroic intransigence, which had once driven the court to extremes against him, would serve thereafter to re-establish him. Hence it would be the Socrates of refutations who would prevail. In a softened popular coloring this is the Socrates of Cicero's well-known description:

Socrates was the first who called philosophy down from the heavens, settled her in the cities and even introduced her into private houses and compelled her to ask questions about life and moral matters and things good and bad. (Tusculan Disputations, V, iv, 10)

But the so-called "Socratic method" would also make harsher reappearances, as "radical doubt," as "enlightenment," as "critique," as the "re-examination of all values" or as the general encouragement of a questioning disposition. In each of these modes, philosophy would penetrate the pretenses to credit of yet another communal way. Without supposing that Plato could have foreseen all these developments, it is yet possible to imagine that he had intimations, that he was apprehensive about the facile vindication of Socrates' way as he was about the learned ossification of his thought. To prevent the latter—or rather to provide a permanent possibility of revival—he wrote numerous Socratic conversations. To forestall the former—or rather to put perennial obstacles in its way—he wrote one Socratic speech. This oration, proud and noble in accordance with the event, was so written as to reveal on re-examination that Socrates had appeared to Plato to have committed an undeniable offense against the city and that he had seen his teacher, once at least, as
truly dangerous. The speech would serve as a warning to future friends—and as an enticement.

To append a modern application: In our polity Socrates' offense is not a capital crime, nor are his modern successors of his stature. Furthermore in a court of law an American citizen juror would be guided and restrained by the Constitution and its interpretations and laws. The judicial issue is therefore much less excruciating—what is more urgent is to form some general opinions about such situations. And here the Apology makes a clear comment, which, stated most cautiously, is: The side resisting enlightenment also has something vital to defend and should be addressed.

There is yet one more thought. Socrates himself would, I am persuaded, live out his life among us doing no harm and receiving none. The great question then to be considered is: Ought such immunity to be a source of high satisfaction or of deep misgiving?

1 Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito, edited with notes by John Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924). References to the dialogues are by Stephanus page. I would like here to draw attention to a very fine treatment, not yet published, by Thomas G. West of the University of Dallas, entitled Plato's Defense of Socrates.


6 Burnet, op. cit., p. 103.


THE PROMETHEUS STORY IN PLATO’S PROTAGORAS*

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In this essay I will first analyze the myth Plato has Protagoras tell in his “great speech,” the story of Prometheus and Epimetheus. Then I will employ what can be learned from the myth to comment on the parts Protagoras and Socrates play in the Protagoras as a whole.¹ The sophist introduces the Prometheus motif into the encounter and Socrates takes it up as their conversation closes. The Prometheus story illuminates the larger story which is the dialogue itself and provides a Platonic comment on issues central to the whole of the Protagoras.

I

Protagoras relates the Prometheus myth after the preliminary scenes in the dialogue are complete and Socrates has begun questioning him on behalf of Hippocrates. The sophist begins his long epideixis (exposition) with this story (320c8-322d5) as an entertaining way to introduce his explanation of how moral and political aretē (excellence) can be taught. That such teaching is possible is what Socrates had claimed to doubt and had challenged the sophist to show (320b8-c1).

In this story of the world’s beginning, the brothers Epimetheus and Prometheus are given the task of fitting men and the other animals with suitable powers and protections once the subterranean gods have fashioned them from the elements. Epimetheus prevails on Prometheus to let him take care of the distribution; Prometheus is then to review his work. Prometheus agrees, only to have Epimetheus run short of available powers just as he reaches mankind. Epimetheus is in a quandary, for humans are left helpless and unprotected. Prometheus intervenes to steal fire and the related arts from Athena and Hephaestus and gives these to men. But once humans are in the


¹I received further advice and encouragement in preparing this essay from Professor David Kolb of Bates College and Professor Hugh Silverman of SUNY at Stony Brook.
light of day, they obviously need the skills of politics and war to survive. Those Prometheus could not steal from Zeus. Zeus pities men and sends Hermes to bestow the technē (craft) of politics on all men. Prometheus is punished for his theft because of Epimetheus' folly.

In telling this story Protagoras intends to begin his explanation of how aretē is taught. But using the Prometheus myth also introduces the cluster of meanings traditionally associated with the figure of Prometheus, especially from the stories told by Hesiod and Aeschylus. In earlier versions of the myth, there was greater hostility between Zeus and Prometheus, for Prometheus was that creative intelligence (Titanic as well as ancestrally human) who wrested fire by stealth from the Olympians on behalf of mankind. Zeus punished him terribly for this defiance. Moreover, Zeus had Epimetheus marry Pandora and so mankind also suffered for Prometheus' benefaction.

Both Prometheus and Epimetheus are Titans, fraternal counterparts bound up with the origin of men. The roles they play in Hesiod's poems correspond to their characters as named: Prometheus is forethought or he who knows in advance; Epimetheus is afterthought or he who learns afterwards. In Aeschylus there is the implicit suggestion that the character of Prometheus includes that of Epimetheus as well. For Promethean foresight is defeated and punished by Zeus; the one who knows in advance becomes inexorably the one who learns afterwards. In its Promethean-Epimethean ancestry, human folly and cleverness, blindness and insight are inseparable.

Protagoras is thus employing mythic figures whose reputations are already established. But the sophist modifies the traditional story in three important ways. Plato's Protagoras first plays down the enmity between Zeus and Prometheus; then he has Prometheus and Epimetheus change roles; third, he expands the character of Epimetheus beyond earlier characterizations.

As Protagoras relates the story, Zeus is a co-benefactor who adds to and secures what Prometheus has provided for mankind. The two share complementary wisdoms represented by the differences in the technai they give to men. Both are concerned to insure that men survive and prosper in their lives together. The sophist also downplays Prometheus' punishment, blaming Epimetheus (di' Epimēthea, 322a1) instead of referring to Zeus directly. This last
modification emphasizes the interrelated roles of both brothers in crime and punishment alike.

The close connection of Epimetheus and Prometheus is underscored because Protagoras' story has the two brothers exchange roles. Epimetheus is to provide for the distribution (a position more apt for Forethought); Prometheus is to check over the results (Afterthought's place). Switching roles does take the two out of character, but subsequent events in the story show that the brothers live up to their names rather than their new positions. As provider Epimetheus is quite in character; he is "not so very smart at all" (ou panu ti sophos, 321b7) and so his pro-vision or foresight leaves men quite literally out in the cold. Prometheus compensates for this oversight by stealing fire and the démiourgikai technai (arts of craftsmen). Such performances correspond to what their names predict. When Epimetheus replaces Prometheus, it turns out that Afterthought still requires Forethought (appropriately—as an afterthought) to contend with the unforeseen emergency and make up for what is lacking. Prometheus foresight is required at the juncture where epimethean hindsight is faced with its consequences: lack of judgment and resourcefulness.

Yet Epimetheus requires Prometheus' assistance only because the two initially changed places. What Protagoras' retelling does is to focus on both Titans, so that Prometheus is no longer substance and Epimetheus shadow, but each is fleshed out as counterpart of the other. The exchange of positions manifests both wisdom and lack thereof in the character of each brother. In spite of their names and dominant capacities, both are revealed by Protagoras (and Plato) as composed of epimethean and promethean aspects. After all, what led to Epimetheus' impasse? Prometheus' lack of foresight in acceding to his request—Forethought should have known better.4

Epimetheus' situation is parallel: his urging the change of roles manifests an expected lack of judgment; he needs to perform before he can come to know, and the hindsight thus attained arrives too late.5 But aside from overlooking mankind, Epimetheus is himself no less than promethean—both able and provident—in his distribution of powers and protections to the other animals. The details in the sophist's story (especially 320d8-321a2) reveal Epimetheus' "lesser wisdom" as nothing to be disdained. Even if he cannot ultimately produce all his novel position demands, his care for the different
animal species is quite expert. In Protagoras' version of the story, Epimetheus is no mere foil for the brilliance of Prometheus, but as much a mix of forethought and afterthought as Prometheus himself.

II

By means of this story Protagoras places the question of teaching aretē in the context of traditional myth and religion and joins the moral training typical in Athens (plus what sophist education will add to it) to the origins of humanity. The myth can capitalize on the feelings and images associated with the sacral figures of Olympian religion so as to confer a special appropriateness on common belief and practice regarding aretē. The conventional daily order is thus shown to conform to the original order bestowed by the gods. Participation in Athenian life enables a return to the beginning and a share in the originating gifts of gods and heroes. Protagoras' teaching would build on current Athenian practice and further cultivate the divine gifts of aidōs and dikē (respect for others and justice).

Protagoras uses the Prometheus story as part of his response to Socrates; the sophist wants to show that aretē can be taught and that he is rather better than other teachers in helping students acquire it (cf. 328b1-5, c3-4). He plays down the enmity between Zeus and Prometheus in the traditional myth so that their gifts may be understood as joint benefactions—part of what it is to be human and live in society. His implicit point is that if the arts and crafts related to fire are taught and learned, it would be natural for political aretē to be taught and learned as well. Protagoras' own teaching thus fits neatly with the benefactions of Zeus and Prometheus, even if he identifies more with Zeus than with the Titan.

Adopting Zeus rather than Prometheus as his main patron is itself a remarkably promethean move on Protagoras' part. Sophist education was meeting some opposition as upsetting the education and politics traditional in Hellas. Since in fact the sophists trained young men to get ahead in the changing socio-political situation, their training could be viewed as rejecting traditional paideia (education) and traditional structures of social and political power. This tradition had always been associated with the forms, at least, of Olympian religion, so sophist education could be interpreted as revolutionary—even promethean. Protagoras' mythos softpedals the antique hostility
between Zeus and Prometheus and joins his own work to the
traditions and conventions the broader sophist movement was
already replacing. Protagoras himself had always been cautious and
respectful of existing customs and mores; here he ably secures the
legitimation and sanction of traditional religious myth for what he
teaches. Choosing to begin his lengthy *epideixis* with this version of
the myth is itself promethean in its foresight.

This interpretation suggests that the sophist’s Prometheus story
may itself provide Platonic comment on what Protagoras is doing in
this speech. Protagoras’ retelling has Prometheus and Epimetheus
exchange roles and gives new prominence to Afterthought, as already
noted. In the story it was Epimetheus whose initiative led to
Prometheus surrendering his position as provider, and Epimetheus
who manifested no little resourcefulness on his own. The sophist’s
changes in the myth may not be just promethean and work wholly to
his advantage; those very changes suggest that he too may exhibit
both promethean and epimethean features, even in this brilliant
speech.

That the *mythos* may also undercut the sophist’s efforts can be
seen if the story is measured against Protagoras’ earlier comments, in
his first speech about himself in the dialogue (316c ff.). In fact, his
opening words in the earlier speech first announced the motif of
forethought, but attributed it to Socrates. The same speech deplored
all sophist disguises and cover stories, urging that Protagoras had
never hidden the fact he was a sophist. Both of these earlier remarks
need serious qualification in light of the sophist’s tale of Prometheus
and Epimetheus.

That earlier speech began with compliments to Socrates for his
tact and forethought in letting Protagoras decide whether to speak in
private or not (316b5). The Greek sentence translates straightforwardly as “You are being really thoughtful on my behalf, Socrates.”
A more antic (though not wholly arbitrary) reading of the same
words might be “You are really playing Prometheus on my behalf,
Socrates.” But if this remark is taken in tandem with the *mythos*,
Protagoras can become Epimetheus greeting his brother. If this line
announces the Prometheus motif, by telling his own version of the
Prometheus story a bit later Protagoras musters forethought (and
Prometheus) on behalf of his own teaching to outdo the Prometheus
he recognized in Socrates. Indeed, the sophist takes the leading role
through the first part of their discussion, dominating the conversa-
tion with his great speech on moral education. And since his myth
suggests that Epimetheus and Prometheus both manifest blindness
and afterthought, it suitably anticipates some of the sophist's later
frustrations when faced with Socrates' pushy questions.

Protagoras may have earlier disavowed pretense or disguise in
admitting he is a sophist, but his own myth helps disguise the actual
effect of his teaching, for it models his project after the benefactions
of Zeus and Prometheus and thus implies that his teaching remains
within sanctioned conventional bounds. And if the explicit promise
Protagoras makes to his students is that they will become powerful in
word and deed in the polis (city-state), he is in fact urging on them a
training that should unhinge the conventional framework of political
power in Athens. The sophist may place his work under the aegis of
Zeus, but the success his students will achieve is epitomized by
clever, resourceful, promethean speech. Employing this Prometheus
story should lead us to expect from the man who tells it exactly such
cleverness. Plato's Protagoras is a man worth careful attention.

III

In the end Socrates also alludes to the Prometheus of the sophist's
story and playfully admits that he needs such a patron (361c7-d5).
He explicitly adopts the Prometheus of the mythos and pledges to
extend forethought to the whole of his life. And the myth
illuminates his words and actions as it did those of Protagoras. The
dialogue shows forethought and afterthought present in the young
Socrates. He cannot simply reject Epimetheus and join himself to
Prometheus as the discussion ends—even this is a Socratic after-
thought, as is his mocking recognition of their apparent change of
positions on teaching areté.

Socrates is no mean Epimetheus in his own right. Only at the end
of the encounter can he identify the lack of foresight in their
inquiry. They were attempting to answer whether areté could be
taught and whether it was unitary—before having considered what
areté is. This oversight has brought them to the final impasse with no
visible Prometheus to aid them. Since it was Socrates who proposed
both questions (cf. 320b8-c1; 329c6-d1), he ought indeed to be
more promethean about such matters for the future.
Interpretation

Socrates just had the personified argument call both principals *atopoi* (361a5)—marvelously absurd—in order to point out the inconclusiveness of their discussion and its epimethean character. As Protagoras and Socrates come to an end, each seems to be saying the opposite of what he first proposed regarding *aretē*. Socrates now contends that *aretē* is knowledge, though initially he denied it could be taught. Protagoras now attempts to separate at least courage from knowledge and thus counters implicitly his original thesis that *aretē* can be taught. For what is separate from knowledge is dubiously teachable, what is equivalent to knowledge obviously can be taught. This mocking sophistry has both men exchange theses about *aretē* and thus recalls how Epimetheus and Prometheus exchanged roles in the *mythos*.

Socrates is hardly serious, for it is not clear that there has been a real reversal of opinion by either man or that they have in fact exchanged positions regarding *aretē*. Rather, what appears to be inconsistency here manifests the lack of forethought and resourcefulness with which they pursued their conversation and the oversight which marks its outcome on the issue of *aretē*. Because they could not secure the cognitive foundations for measuring whether *aretē* is teachable and how it is unitary, their contest-and-discussion wandered piecemeal from description, verbal sophistries, and elenctic examination through poetry, criticism, and lengthy epideixis, all to little avail. The *logos* (argument) exaggerates when it mocks them for inconsistency, for they neither began from nor proceeded to any common point from which they could be so judged.

Socrates reacts by admitting that the issues seem jumbled, but takes this as reason to try harder. Adopting Prometheus, he commits himself to taking forethought for the future. He invites Protagoras to join him again—no one else will do—but for the meantime promises to let forethought shape his attitudes. Both principals are at an impasse, an *aporia*, and seem without promethean resources. Socrates’ invocation of the mythical hero at least suggests two directions for their next encounter. First, they should be more promethean in how they order the conversation, assuming or establishing a common definition of *aretē* before taking up other questions about it. Second, forethought itself may be a crucial element within the definition of *aretē* and thus a key to whether such excellence can be taught or is unitary in nature.
The absence of any shared norm or measure in how they proceeded was tied to their overlooking the nature of aretē. Bypassing the definition of aretē exhibited precisely that lack of foresight which could have provided the normative framework or measure for answering the other questions Socrates raised. Without such a shared grounding, no combination of good will, wisdom drawn from experience, or rhetorical and dialectical expertise could secure the order in their discussion demanded by the questions about aretē. Such a logos possesses internal requirements of its own; talking before taking account of the meaning of aretē turns out to be an epimethean blunder for which neither interlocutor’s promethean talents can compensate.

Both Socrates and Protagoras were united in their praise of knowledge (cf. 352d1-3). But Socrates could get no further in connecting knowledge and aretē than describing how a technique of measuring (= knowledge) would be required for the pursuit of pleasure (= excellence). His efforts along those lines (cf. 352d-359a) at best suggest that learning courage without knowledge would serve the learner as ill as ignorant pleasure-seeking does the hedonist project. Socrates never establishes that knowledge is integral to the meaning or learning of aretē. His final bid to take promethean thought may at least point to the necessity of intelligence and forethought for the presence of human excellence. Even Protagoras reluctantly conceded that andreia (courage) is at least knowledge, whatever else it may amount to.

The story of Epimetheus and Prometheus, then, sets the limits in myth for what to expect from the meeting of Protagoras and Socrates. The sophist introduces Prometheus with “knowledge-a-forethought” when he greets Socrates and again when he elaborates his version of the Prometheus myth. Socrates adopts the story as an afterthought as he reviews their discussion as a whole. Each interlocutor has displayed a combination of epimethean and promethean moments as they conversed and both end rather dissatisfied. Plato’s Prometheus story proposes that afterthought and hindsight are inevitable counterparts of forethought; the performances of Protagoras and Socrates illustrate the plausibility of this proposal.
But reading Protagoras' *mythos* as if it were about Prometheus and Epimetheus alone does scant justice to its resolution of mankind's quandary even after Epimetheus and Prometheus have done their best. In the myth it is Zeus who makes up for the oversight of both brothers. His gifts make political life possible for humankind; he decrees that all are to be given *aidōs* and *dike*; anyone without them is to be slain as a plague to the *polis*. As already mentioned, Protagoras uses this part of the story to join his own educational project with the Olympian's gifts. The sophist offers to extend and perfect the political "virtues" his myth attributes to Zeus' beneficence. But, in addition, this part of the *mythos* also serves to comment on the whole of the *Protagoras*.

Both principals manifest aspects of Prometheus and Epimetheus as they proceed, only to end their conversation without resolving the substantive questions that have been raised about *aretē*. Since their situation upon parting parallels the plight of mankind in the *mythos* even after Prometheus' theft of fire, the gifts of Zeus in the myth suggest a way to move beyond the *aporia* with which the dialogue ends. Two features of Zeus' gifts are noteworthy in this regard. First, they exhibit a continuation of the promethean resourcefulness and progressive insight into what men require to survive and prosper—again Zeus and Prometheus are allied. Second, *aidōs* and *dike* stand as normative measures for political existence. Their normative character provides a connecting link to the questions about *aretē* in the rest of the dialogue.

Zeus' directives for distributing a sense of justice and respect for others and for killing those lacking these qualities make clear that they are standards for participation in the *polis*. To answer Socrates' later challenge about how the "virtues" are connected Protagoras could have returned to his *mythos* and spelled out what it said were minimal conditions of political life. Neither he nor Socrates do this and in this respect they are similarly epimethean throughout. But the two differ in how they see the need and import of such an account of *aretē*. Socrates' ironic reactions and mocking questions to the sophist reflect his recognition of the disparity between what Protagoras professes to teach students and what he evidently understands only vaguely.
Protagoras is usually content to say, in effect, that the conventional "virtues" which comprise political aretē are required for success and power in the polis and that he is better than others in imparting them to students. His great speech shows expertly how convincing a picture he can present of ordinary, if enlightened, beliefs on the subject. Socrates' captious questions and objections ultimately presuppose the sort of account he explicitly calls for only when he invokes Prometheus at the end. For the gifts of Zeus to be more than conventional norms, for it to be possible to make them useful measures, it is necessary to say what aretē comes to and how it relates to knowledge and wisdom. This is why Socrates holds so tenaciously to the belief that even andreia must be joined with knowledge if men are to be really courageous.9

The moral and political "virtues" are more than minimal conditions for citizens' associating with one another; they also stand as ideals or ends for human effort and attainment, setting the parameters to the project of becoming a good citizen, a good person. Defining aretē is not simply a theoretical task that neither Protagoras nor Socrates adequately perform; Socrates at least seems concerned that the definition include the sort of knowing or practical wisdom without which no one can ascertain what aretē demands in a given situation. This is one way Promethean foresight can be spelled out as part of the aretaic project.

Socrates did show some connection between at least one human project (that of the hedonist) and the "art of measuring" (a kind of knowing) in discussing with Protagoras the difference between blind versus enlightened pleasure-seeking. Even the pleasure seeker has to weigh relative amounts of pleasure and/or pain in order to choose alternative actions. If calculation or normative measuring is demanded for expert pleasure-seeking and if knowledge is integral to true courage, some parallel "art of measuring" may be a necessary condition of excellence for any human being. The definition of aretē sets one measure against which practical wisdom can judge the appropriateness of what is to be done.

Protagoras' resourceful Zeus points toward the ends or "virtues" that make up aretē; Socrates' resourceful hedonist must calculate deliberately to take the way to greater pleasure. The irony here is that the way to answering central issues in the Protagoras is suggested by a mythical deity in the sophist's story and by an antic Socratic
model of pleasure-seeking which the sophist finds rather in poor taste and beside the point of heroic courage and wisdom. Both Socrates and Protagoras remain unable to capitalize on these resources, for as Socrates remarks, they have not guarded "against the possibility that your Epimetheus might trip us up and cheat us in our inquiry, just as according to the story he overlooked us in the distribution" (361c7-d2). In spite of the gifts of Zeus, the *Protagoras* is epimethean as well as promethean to the end.


8. Professor Walter Watson of SUNY at Stony Brook first suggested to me the importance of this part of Protagoras' *mythos*.

THE COMIC REMEDY: MACHIAVELLI'S "MANDRAGOLA"*

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In October, 1525, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote to his friend Francesco Guicciardini to explain some difficult passages in the Mandragola, passages which had brought Guicciardini great "distress of mind." In this letter, Machiavelli playfully clarifies a colloquial expression by commenting on a mysterious sonnet by a modern writer, Burchiello. Machiavelli says he believes that a person who considers the sonnet well "may continue to stir up our times." He also refers to an ancient authority: "as Titus Livius says in his second decade ..."—although he is aware that the second decade of Livy's Roman history is not extant. Perhaps his parody of a scholarly analysis of the "light material" (Prologue) of Mandragola should caution those who wish to read the play seriously as well as lightly: one must never forget that it is a staged comedy, "a thing to break one's jaws with laughter" (Prologue).

But since Machiavelli has the distinction of being both an eminent playwright and an outstanding thinker apart from his plays, seriously amused readers should ask how the comedies and the political books are related. The letter to Guicciardini, which seems to mock scholarly commentary, should stand as a check against the distortions of scholarship. Nevertheless, it should not discourage exploration of the sources, subject, and intent of Machiavelli's most famous and most original play. Indeed, the letter may even direct our attention to some of the central meanings of Mandragola.

Part I of this essay will examine Machiavellian virtù in the light of ancient virtue and of Christian virtue, through a discussion of Machiavelli's attitude towards chastity. Central to this discussion is Machiavelli's use of Livy here, as well as in the Discourses, in a new version of the rape of Lucretia. Part II will examine, partly in the light of Paul's Epistles to Timothy, Machiavelli's view of Christian

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man, in his depiction of Frate Timoteo and his flock. Part III will make some suggestions about the relationship between morality and the comic theatre. But, first, Machiavelli’s Prologue invites a Prologue.

**PROLOGUE**

The first stanza of the Prologue to *Mandragola* expresses hope that the audience will “come to understand a new case born in this city [noi vogliam che s'intenda un nuovo caso in questa terra nato].” The aim of this essay is, in part, to come to an understanding of what this means. In the comedy, as well as in the political writings, the claim to newness must always be understood in relation to something old. A reading of *Mandragola* should aim to clarify Machiavelli’s attitudes towards old things—towards conventional morality, towards the conventions of drama, and towards the conventional purposes of drama.

Italian theatre at the time Machiavelli wrote was dominated by the influence of the Roman comic playwrights, Terence and Plautus, who modeled their plays on Greek “New Comedy.” In cities throughout Italy much time and money were devoted to research on and productions, in Latin or in newly prepared translations, of the Roman plays. Machiavelli’s letters are peppered with allusions to them, and, like many of his acquaintances, he translated one of these plays (Terence’s *Andria*). In addition to the revivals of Plautus and Terence, the end of the fifteenth and start of the sixteenth centuries saw the growth of a new native genre, the *Commedia Erudita*, based on the old Roman plots and characters, but self-consciously refusing to be servile to antiquity, and emphasizing such new elements as Italian settings, some indigenous characters, and a modern vernacular language. The Prologue to Machiavelli’s *Clizia* acknowledges its source as Roman comedy (Plautus’ *Casina*) and implies what Machiavelli’s political writings explicitly say: that one can benefit from accounts of ancient times because human nature does not change.

*Mandragola* begins with a conventional address to the audience, one which combines the techniques of both Plautus and Terence. It introduces what appears to be a new play in the style of the *Commedia Erudita*. The argument draws attention to the conven-
tional street setting, and to the houses of familiar Roman characters—the young lover, the chaste maiden he loves, a foolish old man—and to one familiar modern one, the priest. The heroine’s mother bears a name found frequently in the plays of Terence. Early in the play, Machiavelli jokes about his stagey exposition. Later there are explicit, albeit humorous, references to unity of time, an ancient stage convention which Italian critics came to emphasize in the latter half of the century. The action of the play is more unified in the Roman manner, than that in most contemporary plays. Thus, here, as well as in Andria and Clizia, Machiavelli indicates his familiarity with the ancient comic models. But unlike the plots of Andria and Clizia, the plot of Mandragola is original. While it might at first resemble new versions of ancient comedy and another popular new form, the novella of Boccaccio and Cinthio, Machiavelli’s “new case born in this city” will prove to be newer in a more serious way than these already conventional novelties.

The fifth and sixth stanzas of the Prologue continue to juxtapose old and new things. After the conventional Plautian presentation of the argument, the author begins, more in the defensive and threatening tone of a Terence prologue, to justify the “light material” of this work: no one appreciates and rewards his graver endeavors; this scorn for worthy actions is proof that “in all things, the present age has fallen off from ancient worth [l’antica virtù].” Readers of The Prince and Discourses will recognize a familiar theme from the introductory letters and prologues, and from passages dealing with the significance of the works and the importance of renovating and being reborn. Machiavelli’s repeated claim is that he will teach his readers new things by presenting them with ancient as well as recent ones. Again and again he urges the imitation of antiquity, though, as we shall see, he often presents new versions of these examples for his own purposes. Machiavelli is fully aware of the danger of advocating the rejection of present practices and beliefs for older ones, and of revising old beliefs in order to set forth new ones. Thus, he says at the beginning of the Discourses, that “it has always been no less dangerous to find new modes and orders than it has been to look for unknown seas and lands” (D. I intro.).

Might the danger of presenting a “new case” explain why the Prologue to Mandragola is so reticent about claiming a didactic purpose, one which might even make its author seem as “wise and
grave” as he says he wishes to appear? His contemporaries seem to have discussed widely the Ciceronian injunction that comedy should instruct as well as entertain the audience. Donatus’ commentaries on Terence, recently recovered in 1433, repeated this precept and, though it was disregarded and even mocked in many contemporary plays, Machiavelli himself seems to have thought about it. In Clizia, less original in plot than Mandragola, and perhaps less novel in thought as well, the Prologue speaks of the play’s effect on youth:

Comedies exist to help and to delight the spectators. It is truly very helpful to any man, and especially to young men, to recognize an old man’s avarice, a lover’s furor, a servant’s tricks, a parasite’s gluttony, a poor man’s misery, a rich man’s ambition, a prostitute’s flatteries, the little faith of all men.9

However un-Ciceronian the lesson of “la poca fede di tutti li uomini” may be,9 there is in Clizia, some explicit claim to teach. Similarly in his “Discourse about our Language,” Machiavelli says that, although the aim of a comedy is:

to hold up a mirror to private life, nevertheless, its way of doing it is with a certain urbanity and with terms which incite laughter, so that the men who run to that great delight, taste afterwards the useful example that is underneath.10

Again, the meaning of “useful” is unclear, but at least the claim is made. One wonders why it is so muted in Mandragola.

Perhaps Machiavelli’s reticence about this subject is due to his awareness that the lessons to be drawn from the “new case born in this city” are much more radically new than are those of a new version of a new version of “New Comedy”—that they differ greatly from the usual poetic attempts of older men to shape the young. If this were so, Machiavelli’s comic drama about the “remedy” mandragola would be as subversive of contemporary beliefs as the drastic “remedies” he discusses in the serious political works. To understand the relationship between these comic and serious remedies, we must see how Machiavelli rejects the older teachings—both ancient and contemporary (Christian)—by presenting his dramatic “new case.”
A. Virtù: Public and Private

In form, Mandragola resembles ancient Roman comedy. But its plot is to be found in ancient Roman history, the very history Machiavelli claims as his subject in Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius, and which he jokingly connects with Mandragola in the letter to Guicciardini quoted above. To understand what is new and what is old in Machiavelli's play, and what he intends to teach, we must compare Livy's account of the rape of the Roman Lucretia and the events which followed, with Machiavelli's account of the possession of a Christian Lucrezia and the probable results.¹¹

Let us begin with the husbands. Livy depicts Collatine and his friends as warriors, in the "vigour of youth,"¹² and their bragging and wager are described as a "boyish prank of the night."¹³ These are the men who are soon to rise and overthrow the tyrannical Tarquins, and to establish a republican regime in Rome. The husband in Machiavelli's play, Messer Nicia Calfucci, is an elderly and impotent bourgeois lawyer who is ruled by women and can weep tender tears. His earthy Tuscan speech and his occasional regret that he didn't marry a country girl, remind us that he is less sophisticated that the cosmopolitan city-slickers who trick him. Like most loyal citizens, he grumbles about his position in the city, but he is totally attached to Florence—by habit, by his timidity, and by his possessions. He is reluctant to leave, even for a short trip to the baths. He brags about his experience; but his foolishness, his lack of "spirit [animo]," and his professional concentration on books, render him unfamiliar with the "things of the world [cose del mondo]" (III, 2). The Prologue tells us he read much, especially in "Buezio." Machiavelli's strange spelling of Boethius might suggest that Nicia's decency is the sort of bovine mildness which is easily led by the nose. His name ironically suggests that he will be a loser. This essay will suggest that Machiavelli attributes the defeat of Nicia to the nature of his religion, to superstition and to piety.¹⁴

Machiavelli's revised version of the man who would displace Lucretia's husband is more complex. In Mandragola the hereditary tyrant of Rome is replaced by Callimaco Guadagni, whose ancient Greek and modern Italian names indicate his noble struggle for gain(s). The first Song¹⁵ seems to associate Callimaco with the
unpolitical life. Like the nymphs and shepherds, he has lived for pleasure and comforts. An expatriate since his childhood, he has enjoyed a peaceful private life in Paris while the French king was ravishing his native country. Even in France, as he reminds his servant, Callimaco was unattached to any party or special interests, to any class, or even to any one pastime. When he decided to return home, he easily parted with all his goods. The arguments in which the would-be lovers first hear of the women they desire are also strikingly different. In *Livy*, strong warrior compatriots sit drinking around a campfire and argue about the virtue and honor of women. In *Machiavelli*, the "noble warrior" fled from war and heard of Lucrezia, the relative of an acquaintance, at a leisurely international gathering.

Sextus Tarquin returns to Rome alone and steals into Lucretia's home. He threatens to kill and defame her if she doesn't yield, and then rapes her. Lucretia submits in order to live and denounce her assailant, and then kills herself. In *The Prince* Machiavelli argues that fraud is preferable to force in achieving the Prince's aims. (P. XVIII). Later, he asserts that the man of ability controls Fortune as if she were a woman (P. XXV): she must be beaten until she is submissive to the strong man's will. In *Mandragola* even a woman is best won not by force, but by fraud. In the new version of the siege of Lucretia, nothing is accomplished by coercion. As Nicia says, his faith in his deceiver is stronger than that of the Hungarians in their swords (II, 2). His own little sword is only a comic prop and he is swiftly conquered by a bold and risky plot in which the lover wins the cooperation of the husband and his mother-in-law, and finally, of the woman he desires. In place of the death of the dishonored Lucretia and the subsequent banishment and death of her violator, Machiavelli shows the continued life and honor of Lucrezia and her lover, and promises another life as the fruit of their liaison. Instead of the overthrow of a tyranny and its replacement by a republic, we see a thoroughly private man secure the pleasures that even a successful tyrant must usually forego. Machiavelli's Florence is unaware of and unshaken by the acquisition of a new domain by the usurper, Callimaco Guadagni. Both lust and tyranny desire without limit, but, as Machiavelli suggests elsewhere, the private man can better afford to risk satisfying unlimited sexual desires. In this respect, the "regime" of the potent lover is less limited than that of the greatest
potentate. The man in whom love plays the tyrant is the most tyrannical man. We must further explore Callimaco's relation to Machiavelli's great princes.

Although Callimaco is energetic and intelligent, he is unable to achieve by himself what he wants for himself. As a result of his desperate passion, he is moody, frenzied, and even foolish. At one point he contemplates suicide as an alternative to risky plots. His reason is dedicated to serving an irresistible desire which sometimes reduces him to confusion. This confusion is uncharacteristic of Machiavelli's greatest rulers. Callimaco is perhaps more like those second-level intelligences in The Prince who can discern and make use of what others understand. (P. XXV). Thus, he acquires an advisor who exercises virtù analogous to that exhibited by the most outstanding men. It is Ligurio (the "gloater" or the "tyer-up") who pulls the strings of the intrigue. He calls himself "capitano" and arranges his "army" (IV, 9) to carry out this conspiracy. When Callimaco's "animo" fails, it is Ligurio who always thinks of a "remedy." Machiavelli plays down the gluttony of the Roman and Italian parasites on whom Ligurio is superficially modeled, and emphasizes his sheer delight in imposing his will on others: "Your blood is in accord with mine and I desire for you to satisfy this desire of yours almost as much as you do yourself" (I, 3). Machiavelli never allows him a soliloquy. This enhances his independence and authority, while depriving his companions and the audience of any clear knowledge of his motives. He feels a vague kinship with Callimaco, but his "desire" clearly has nothing to do with sex. As a former marriage broker, he knows the natures of men and women. Playing on the beliefs and desires of greedy, gullible, and fearful people, he plots with prudence, courage, and secrecy. He acts swiftly, spending the money of others, and, in Lucrezia's case, changes the nature of the conquered in order to secure his aims. By the end of the play, he has won, not only the previously denied privilege of dining with Nicia, but also the keys to his house. If Callimaco is the new "ruler" in that house, Ligurio has ruled the ruler. Thus, he is closely akin to another advisor of princes, to Machiavelli himself.

Like the projects of Machiavelli's able princes and unlike Tarquin's, Callimaco's plot succeeds because the conspirators provide that their "good" or "advantage" (bene) benefits others. Thus, the remedy for Callimaco's unbearable discomfort coincides with the
Interpretation

remedy for Nicia's and Lucrezia's childlessness. Nicia is not so simply a loser as his name might at first suggest. The same remedy relieves the pecuniary difficulties of Frate Timoteo and Ligurio. The remedy, of course, is not the medicinal mandragola, but, as the Song after Act Three says: "The trick [inganno]... Oh remedy high and rare."

At first, Callimaco, like many tyrants, cares only for pleasure and the satisfaction of present selfish desires. But, like Machiavelli's prudent princes, and unlike ordinary tyrants—a word never used in The Prince—Callimaco exercises restraint and thinks ahead. Although he doesn't hesitate to take another man's wife, he is not a conventional Don Juan. He is an adulterer but not a libertine. Unlike the Don, Callimaco proves his superiority by secretly succeeding in one conquest, not by flaunting a series of violations and, thus, courting his own fall. Thus, before the play is over, Callimaco has promised to be the godfather of his natural child, and to marry that child's mother when her husband dies. The marriage proposal is his own addition to Ligurio's plan. The conquest, which must be enjoyed secretly at first, finally will be legitimate and Callimaco publicly will acknowledge himself the master of Messer Nicia's household.

Although Callimaco plans for the continuing satisfaction of his present desires, his success is limited by the limits of the field of action he has chosen. He himself recognizes the temporary character of his success:

... and if this happiness couldn't fail either through death or through time, I would be more blessed than the blessed, more saintly than the saints (V, 4).

Though he can manipulate men and women and even Fortune, he cannot conquer death or time. This, above all, distinguishes Callimaco from the new princes whom Machiavelli discusses elsewhere. The language of love in Machiavelli's plays is derived from the language of war, and love itself is a battle to prevail. But, because the conspirators invest all their talents and spirit in an undercover struggle for acquisition, there is no immortal glory for the victors. In Machiavelli's political works the greatest prince eventually organizes everything anew in order to insure that the regime he founds will outlive him. The Discourses indicate that this is most possible in a glorious and long-lived republic. This end of princely virtù—glory—is
never tasted in the "light material" of the comedy. Love can be only a second-best activity for men like Callimaco (and Ligurio) who have forswn politics. Where the end is a woman there can be only an approximation of the struggles and successes of noble captains of men. Marital affairs are only a pale parody of martial ones.

Although Callimaco cannot be simply equated with the political men of virtù whom Machiavelli describes in other works, his "new case" does clarify some of the most difficult questions raised by those books. First, the play vividly presents individuals who embody the view of human nature on which Machiavelli's political teaching is based. Even though this presentation of human nature seems less harsh than the general statements in The Prince, the "low" desires of Timoteo, Nicia, Sostrata, and the anonymous Donna are the same as those of the subjects the prince might rule. According to a notorious remark of Machiavelli, men forget more quickly the death of their fathers than the loss of what they inherit from their fathers (P. XVII). The play clearly indicates that Nicia's tender anticipation of fatherhood grows out of his concern for his estate: he wants an heir. Nicia and all of Machiavelli's people are characterized by an overriding concern for themselves. The play demonstrates this structurally. Many scenes begin or end with one of the conspirators spying on or doubting the loyalty of one of his fellows.

Concern for oneself seems to increase with virtù. The most striking thing about Callimaco is his detachment. Having lost his father as a child, and having no attachment to his fatherland, he is willing to father a child whose true connection to him will never be revealed. In addition to lacking country, parents, and brothers, Callimaco is a man without friends. In this he differs from the young lovers in the Roman plays. Ligurio is a recent acquaintance and an inferior. The former Paris companions are never mentioned in connection with Callimaco after the first scene. The goal for which Callimaco temporarily unites with others aptly indicates Machiavelli's view of human existence as an isolated struggle to prevail: success in the winning of a woman is unshareable. Love is often thought to be ennobling because it makes the lover less self-regarding. But sexual fulfillment for Callimaco is not characterized by affectionate union with the partner. Although he is called a "lover," and although the Song after Act Two speaks conventionally of "loving another more than oneself," Callimaco's love for Lucrezia, like hers for him, is
severely limited. They share their victory over a third party. She is attracted by his ingenuity and virility, which so contrast with the frustrating incapacity of her husband. He is attracted by the challenge of her resistance. In his plotting and success, his attention is always fixed upon himself. Mandragola presents the people among whom one lives primarily as the means and objects of one's desires. Love, friendship, and family affection are all contracted into self-interest.

The dominating principle of self-interest is seen even more starkly in the comedy than in the works with public subjects. In the latter, the common good of patriotism sometimes seems to mitigate Machiavelli's harsh view of selfish human nature and his advocacy of the extreme self-assertion of the prince. If Machiavelli plays down the force of fatherly feelings and filial affections, he certainly advocates the exaltation of the fatherland. The higher "common" good of patriotism thus seems to justify the harsh and questionable means said to be necessary for political ends. In the political writings Machiavelli does not deny the distinction between good and evil acts. Rather, he emphasizes the need to weigh alternatives and make choices. Mandragola also articulates this utilitarian principle, but the play's effect is to collapse the distinction. Conventionally evil behavior is presented as good. The principles of The Prince are equally successful in high public and in low private affairs. Machiavelli goes out of his way to emphasize that the protagonist of his play is an unpatriotic man. The common good of the play is nothing more than the sum of the private goods and desires of the conspiring individuals. Finally, in the political realm the true and lasting success of the leader(s) requires that they improve the subjects whose desires they must satisfy. Callimaco and Ligurio show no such concern.

B. Virtue: Public and Private

Let us now examine more closely Machiavelli's attitude towards the traditional virtue whose value is obscured in the course of the play. Machiavelli's treatment of sexual transgression and its corresponding opposite, chastity, can be taken as a measure of his attitude towards vice and virtue in general. An examination of relevant passages in the political works will show how the play also rejects traditional ancient (Aristotelian and Roman) and Christian notions of moral virtue.
In *The Prince* and in the *Discourses* Machiavelli warns against violating the honor of the wives and daughters of one's subjects.\(^1\) He approves of Scipio's behavior in Spain, where he returned a daughter to her father, and a young wife to her husband (D. III, 20). Machiavelli says that Scipio imitated the "chastity, affability, humanity, liberality" of Xenophon's Cyrus (P. XIV). But one can see from the references to Scipio that a leader's concern with the virtue of women is merely political, a means by which the virtù of men can prevail. Scipio's "chastity" is an example of the calculated exhibition of a moral virtue which the people wish to see in great men. The people are so attached to such virtues that Scipio's return of the women, the most jealously guarded of men's possessions, was more effective than force would have been. Thus, as Castiglione's conversants in *The Book of the Courtier* agree, Scipio's "continence" was only a kind of "military strategem."\(^2\) For Machiavelli, as for Cyrus, chastity is not valued for its own sake. *The Prince* makes clear that it is the *appearance* of virtue which insures support for a leader. Furthermore, Machiavelli even argues openly elsewhere that Scipio's "virtues" were not always as effective as Hannibal's "rapine" (D. III, 21).

These remarks about Scipio should be kept in mind when evaluating Machiavelli's strange unique reference to Aristotle—as the authority for the view that "among the first causes of the ruins of tyrants [is] their having injured others with respect to their women, either by raping them or by violating them or by breaking marriages. . ." (D. III, 26).\(^3\) At this point he attributes the falls of Tarquin and the Decemvir Appius Claudius to their misconduct in this respect. However, other passages about Tarquin and Appius, whose experiences are closer than Scipio's or Hannibal's to the one dramatized in *Mandragola*, comment differently on the falls of these unchaste men.

Machiavelli discusses the fall of Appius Claudius, but he minimizes the outrage of his attempts to violate Virginia. Livy parallels the expulsions of the Tarquins and the Decemvirs and deals with the Virginia episode at great length. He reports the moral indignation of Virginia's friends and betrothed, and describes Appius' "crime" and "lust" and his attraction, like that of Tarquin for Lucretia, to the girl's "modesty" and beauty.\(^4\) The Roman historian seems to agree with Virginia's father that chaste death is preferable to sullied life. The Roman people believe that Appius' ruin is due, in part, to the
anger of the gods. In contrast, Machiavelli mentions Virginia only in passing, as another cause of disturbances when the insatiable Appius attempted to exercise his tyranny. Appius’ greater, though perhaps related, defect was one of military strategem: “being cruel and rough in commanding, he was badly obeyed by his troops” (D. III, 19). There is no suggestion of divine punishment for tyrannical lust.

Machiavelli tacitly comments on Livy’s version of Lucretia—both in his play and in his account of the episode in the Discourses. In the latter, he omits all of the passionate outrage found in Livy, and also present in Ovid’s account and in Boccaccio’s De Claris Mulieribus. There is no anger about the violation of a grave Roman matron’s honor. Contrary to Machiavelli’s later statement, the rape of Lucretia was not even the major cause of the fall of the Roman tyrant. It simply provided the first occasion for Romans to react decisively to continued deprivation of their liberties:

Tarquin was not driven from Rome because his son Sextus had raped Lucretia, but because he had broken the laws of the kingdom and governed it tyrannically. (D. III, 5)

In shifting the emphasis, Machiavelli says seriously in the political treatise what the play depicts comically: chastity like the other moral virtues, is a matter of political prudence, to be judged according to the situation.

Machiavelli’s teachings thus differ greatly from those of the authority he cites on the subject of women. Whatever Aristotle’s conclusions may be about the ultimate status of moral virtue, his rhetoric is conservative of such virtue. The passage to which Machiavelli refers is found in Book Five of the Politics, in the discussion of how the various regimes can preserve themselves. Aristotle’s “advice” to tyrants—much of which Machiavelli transmits to his own prince—is stated in such a way as to make tyranny less bad, to move it toward the more virtuous monarchical regime. Perhaps his warnings against violating the women of subjects should be read in conjunction with an earlier passage from the Ethics. In his earliest definition of virtue as a mean, he emphatically states the opinion that some actions and passions do not admit of means, that they are bad in themselves:

nor is [acting] well or not well about such things a matter of [for example] with
whom, and when, and how one commits adultery, but simply doing any of these whatever is to go astray.25

Although he repeatedly cautions against absolute rules in moral and political matters, he does seem to approve of the opinion that there are some deeds which are base, even if justifiable in extreme circumstances. He discusses such circumstances with great delicacy.

Machiavelli's writings openly teach the use of virtue and vice in clever alternation; no deed is ruled out. His play celebrates adultery, and the Discourses approve of worse crimes in some circumstances. The founding of Rome, made possible by fratricide, also required the rapes of Rhea and the Sabine women. Machiavelli does not mention these rapes but one can assume he could justify them if necessary. Interestingly, Callimaco's description of his talk with Lucrezia sounds something like Livy's Romulus wooing the Sabines after they have been taken by force.26 Callimaco's tricky seduction is, of course, a more efficient way to get and keep one woman.

It is interesting that Machiavelli does not mention the famous adultery of King David, whom he holds up for imitation in the political books.27 For David, as for Callimaco, there is no common or national good which could justify his treatment of Uriah and Bathsheba. Nathan faults the Biblical David, not for impurity, but for injustice, and the king admits his lack of pity. But Machiavelli ignores the personal and political troubles which the Biblical narrative seems to connect with this incident. Perhaps Machiavelli's edited account of David means to suggest that the very greatest princes might ignore Aristotle's and his own warning about women.

Leaving Machiavelli's views of chastity, as seen through his version of the Lucretia story, we turn to a famous Christian commentary on the incident. In The City of God, Saint Augustine, upholding the value of chastity, exonerates Lucretia from any blame for having been overcome by Tarquin. Like the authors of the many medieval exempla based on her story, Augustine asserts that a woman's most precious possession is her sexual purity. He recognizes that Lucretia was chaste in intention and was violated against her will. But he does fault her for her characteristic pagan attachment to worldly honor. Christian women, similarly violated, would suffer patiently and would neither postpone nor pursue death to preserve their reputations:
They have the glory of chastity within them, the testimony of their conscience. They have this in the sight of God, and they ask for nothing more.\textsuperscript{28}

Machiavelli's Lucrezia begins as a Christian version of Livy's idealized Roman matron. She abandons the chastity of her forbear, but shares her pagan concern for honor. She lives to enjoy continued sexual infidelities with an untroubled conscience, but is careful to preserve her reputation, that is, the appearance of honor, as well. While both imitating and revising the Roman example, Machiavelli thoroughly rejects the Christian view.

Paul and Augustine preach the moral virtue of chastity because powerful sexual attractions, and even marriage, distract the Christian's attention from his primary concern with God and the eternal afterlife. If, to avoid worse distractions, one must marry, the marriage must be chaste. In a theology whose central notion is Love, deviation and failure are aptly described as fornication and adultery. The great Christian poets whom Machiavelli's contemporaries revered depict love for a woman as an image of the divine love to which man's soul aspires. Dante's Beatrice is unattainable except in the life hereafter, and even there she is a temporary stop on the way to a Love which no longer desires. This Christian view, reinforced with Renaissance Platonism, emerges as the ideal courtly love in The Book of the Courtier. The formulation is given after strict injunctions to faithfulness of wives to husbands, no matter how badly matched two partners are,\textsuperscript{29} and after rejections of deceit in courtship:\textsuperscript{30}

Therefore let us direct all the thoughts and powers of our souls to this most holy light, that shows us the path leading to heaven; and, following after it and divesting ourselves of those passions wherewith we were clothed when we fell, by the ladder that bears the image of sensual beauty at its lowest rung, let us ascend to the lofty mansion where heavenly, lovely, and true beauty dwells, which lies hidden in the inmost secret recesses of God, so that profane eyes cannot behold it. Here we shall find a most happy end to our desires, true rest from our labors, the sure remedy for our miseries, most wholesome medicine for our illnesses, safest refuge from the dark storms of life's tempestuous sea.\textsuperscript{31}

Machiavelli's remedy is a direct attack on the views which come together in The Courtier. Boldly, he introduces Callimaco as an outstanding example of "courtesy [gentilezza]." But the object of Callimaco's love is only a beautiful and virtuous woman. There is no indication that she represents anything more than that; he never
speaks of her as the embodiment of a perfect ideal. Concentrating on the "things of the world," Machiavelli abandons the quest for the City of God to speak about cities of men as they are, not as they ought to be. He follows Boccaccio's example in another "new" genre, and exalts the natural and present pleasures of sex. He recognizes that most men must abide by sexual regulations as a means to avoid the related evils of striving and strife. Thus, the Romans were wise to forbid mere mortals to indulge in the philanderings of Jupiter, and Moses' Decalogue prudently included a prohibition against adultery. But Machiavelli's play shows that, if one can indulge one's sexual desires secretly and with impunity, and even satisfy the desires of others in doing so, there is nothing inherently wrong with lust: purity is not a prime value for men or women. Part II of this essay will continue to explore the relationship between Machiavelli's rejection of Christianity and his teachings about politics and sex.

II. A PREACHER FOR FLORENCE

One of the most interesting members of the conspiracy to invade and conquer Messer Nicia's domain is Frate Timoteo, who makes possible Callimaco's first evening with Lucrezia. Since Machiavelli's discussions of ancient Rome often include or imply radical critiques of modern Rome, of the principles and effects of Christianity, it is important to understand how a modern Christian priest figures in this new version of the ancient story of Lucretia.

On May 17, 1521, when he was ambassador to the Friars Minor in Capri, Machiavelli wrote to Guicciardini how--sitting on a privy--he had contemplated the preacher he would like for Florence. Just as he has never lacked a republic, at least in thought, so he can now imagine a preacher--but, as in his other opinions, he will be "obstinate," and his view will differ from that of the other citizens:

They would like a preacher who would show them the road to Paradise, and I should like to find one who would teach them the way to go to the house of the Devil; they would like, besides, that he should be a man prudent, blameless and true; and I should like to find one crazier than Ponzo, more crafty than Fra Girolamo, more of a hypocrite than Frate Alberto... because I believe the true way of going to Paradise would be to learn the road to Hell in order to avoid it.
The stage friar Machiavelli creates for Florence is indeed crafty and hypocritical. Under the guise of Christian piety he teaches the road to hell. But in Machiavelli’s play neither the Frate’s flock nor the Florentine audience to whom this road is shown is counselled to avoid it. In fact, like many of Machiavelli's other works, the play does not seriously dwell on the existence of hell—or of sin, conscience, or immortal souls. Timoteo’s traditional Christian authority is depicted as serving private and profane aims contrary to traditional Christian beliefs. He is initially described as an “ill-living friar [frate mal vissuto]”; an audience would expect him to resemble the hypocritical friars so often condemned in Renaissance literature. But as the play progresses, the “ends” of his participation in the conspiracy are repeatedly referred to as “beni.” The good is now synonymous with the advantageous. By redefining “the good,” Machiavelli’s play rejects the Christian notion that “an evil man out of his evil treasure” will always bring forth evil. A closer look at his Christians will show why.

Frate Timoteo’s greatest influence seems to be with women. We first see him in a crowd of women speaking with one widow (III, 3). As we soon realize, this widow’s religious belief is really belief in the priest’s authority, or belief in his beliefs. Thus she asks in the same tone whether the priest believes (“credate voi?”) her husband is in purgatory and, shortly after, whether he believes (“credate voi?”) the Turks will pass through Italy this year. The latter question, which also reveals her frightened belief in rumors about Turkish torture, is one which amused Machiavelli when the womanish Friars Minor discussed it with him. But Frate Timoteo is no ordinary weak Friar. Believing that “all women have few brains” (III, 9), he manipulates Sostrata, who believes everything he says, and finally even Lucrezia, who doubts him. The only man who trusts Timoteo is Messer Nicia. Although he, too, thinks women are stupid, he is soft and credulous like them. As he gains “faith” in the false doctor Callimaco, Nicia says he trusts him as much as his confessor (II, 6). Although Nicia is not a devout practicing Christian, he has been brought up in the Church and maintains an attachment to it. Machiavelli seems to suggest that Italian Christianity, along with Nicia’s indolent bourgeois life, has made him impotent in more than one way and, therefore, subject to the deceits of more vigorous men.

Here, as elsewhere, Machiavelli indicates that the virtues, as taught
The Comic Remedy: Machiavelli's "Mandragola"

by Christianity, appeal to and cultivate the feminine in human nature. 37 To Machiavelli, those like the friars, who might be said to have "made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven," 38 are no different from women. Christian virtue thrives on peace and indoors activities, and teaches brotherhood and submissive obedience to authority. The strife that arises in modern times, like that mentioned in the play between Christians and Turks, or between Florence and France over Papal alliances, is between conflicting religious parties. It may be especially fierce and bloody, but it is carried out in the name at least of future peace and love. Machiavelli sees these aims as unattainable and regards attempts to achieve them as likely to produce even worse disorders than the pre-Christian world endured. In place of this effeminate, even impotent, humane notion of human virtue and the evils it gives rise to, Machiavelli would substitute the vigorous "antica virtù" that he admires in the Romans. He would like to see this virtù—with all the implications of virility in its Latin root—born anew in his city. 39 This renaissance would be accompanied by an ardent love of liberty and independence, and by the ability to defend oneself and one's domain. In this renewal, the virtues taught by religion and treasured by the common people, especially women, would or would not be employed by strong men, according to their aims and circumstances.

Timoteo's first association with the conspirators is the abortion ruse. After this first test, he virtually contracts himself to cooperate with Callimaco and Ligurio. It is soon clear that Timoteo uses popular religious beliefs and fears to further his own ends. He pretends to the women that he learns how to act by studying books, but unlike Nicia and ordinary friars, he is familiar with the "things of the world." This is underlined by his allusions to time, which are surprisingly frequent for a man whose traditional focus might be expected to be on eternity. 40 Like Savonarola, Timoteo is crafty. Although he ceaselessly inveighed against the worldly-wise, the great Florentine preacher may—according to Machiavelli—have availed himself of their methods. Unlike the Roman augurs, Savonarola was a Christian and preached in an enlightened city. But like them, he gained the confidence of the people through references to supernatural powers. Numa claims he spoke with a nymph, whereas "The people of Florence ... were persuaded by Frate Girolamo Savonarola that he spoke with God" (D. I, 11). Machiavelli does not
comment further on the truth of the belief Savonarola inspired.

Timoteo, too, combines worldly virtù with Christianity. We know that his miracles are man-made. Like mandragola, they are contrived by astute men to manipulate beliefs, and thus events, as they desire. Just as Callimaco's “remedy” works only because Nicia has “faith” in him, the Frate's miracles work because of his ability to inspire belief, faith, and trust. The connection between the success of “miracles” and the ability of the people involved is nicely presented in Clizia. At one point, Sofronia's credulous husband refers to the characters of Mandragola and to Timoteo's success when he prayed that Lucrezia might have a child. Sofronia, who prays for a miracle on her own behalf and then manipulates her husband's beliefs to insure that it occurs, knows how the Frate works miracles. Like other prudent and competent people in Machiavelli's works, he relies only on himself.41 Like the Romans, Timoteo knows the value of religion which is “used well” (D. I, 13, 14, 15). Thus, he recognizes that the reputation of a miracle-working Madonna depends on the friars, and that they have been lax. Repeating the words he uses about women, he remarks that his friars have “few brains” (V, 1). For Machiavelli, the only miracle in Mandragola might be one like that referred to in his chapter on conspiracies in the Discourses: "When one [a conspiracy] has been kept secret among many men for a long time it is held to be a miraculous thing" (D. III, 6).

The debunking of miracles is accompanied by the parody or distorted use of religious language throughout the play. In the hymn-like Song to trickery, “inganno” is not only the “remedy high and rare” which Nicia supposes is mandragola; it is also the means of true salvation:

you show the straight path to wandering souls; you with your great valor, in making someone blessed you make Love rich. You conquer, with your holy counsels alone, stones, venoms, and enchantments.

Similarly, the Song after Act Four asserts that “holy” Night is the only cause that makes souls blessed." The only “passione” in the play is the one which makes Lucrezia sweat (III, 11), and the adulterous “mystery” is watched over by Saint Cuckoo and the Angel Raphael. Perhaps Machiavelli is playing upon the angel’s name, which means “God has healed” (italics added).42 The “match”
between Lucrezia and Callimaco, which is arranged by the marriage broker Ligurio, is solemnized in church by Frate Timoteo. This solemn blessing and Callimaco’s consent to be the baby’s godfather are further blasphemies Machiavelli suggests in connection with his new preacher.

Timoteo must accomplish several “seductions” of his own to earn the alms he desires. Like Machiavelli’s men of virtù, he makes no attempt to raise his parishioners to unattainable standards. He never exhorts them to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Rather he descends to the level of Sostrata and uses her to attain his purpose. Lucrezia’s mother speaks often of her “conscience,” which is eased as soon as the priest assures her that the proposed act is not sinful. Like Callimaco and the “good companions [buon compagni]” of the Prologue, she is a “buona compagnia” (I, i) at heart. She herself expresses the principle of choosing “the best among bad courses [de cattivi partiti il migliore]” (III, 1), and advises her daughter to relax and enjoy her evening. Lucrezia, however, whose nature is alien to love (“le cose d’amore”) and amusements, requires a discussion about sin and conscience. Timoteo’s arguments are based on the Machiavellian premise of no absolute good or evil, or as the Frate says, “It is the truth that there is no honey without flies.” (III, 4). Early in the play he accepts Ligurio’s argument for abortion because the “good [bene] is what does good for the most people” (III, 4). Ligurio begins “I believe” and articulates a utilitarian definition of good which replaces the moral virtues traditionally taught by religion. This new “credo” is blessed by Timoteo and developed in subsequent discussions with Lucrezia.

The Frate’s rhetoric is calculated to lead her “to my wishes” (III, 9). He begins with the argument that strange and fearful things seem normal and acceptable when we are used to them (III, 11). “As to the conscience,” he generalizes that a “certain good [bene] is always preferable to an uncertain evil” (III, 11). Despite his willingness to condone an abortion earlier, he now emphasizes the good deed of creating another soul for the Lord. Later, in private, he too seems uneasy about his actions, but again he rationalizes them by the “great good [bene]” (IV, 6) that will come from the evils of deceit, adultery, and his own desire for money.

With Lucrezia, however, he denies that the act is a sin. This belief, he declares, is a “fable [favola].” We might think here of the stories
teaching that chastity is inviolable, like those in Livy, Ovid, or the medieval exemplary fables. At this point, Timoteo repeats some of the pleas of the original Lucretia's husband and friends, who beg her not to despair. Timoteo's argument that "the will is what sins, not the body" is almost a parody of the extended discussion of Lucretia's chastity in *The City of God*:

"A paradox! There were two persons involved and only one committed adultery," Finely and truly said. The speaker observed in the union of two bodies the disgusting lechery of the one, the chaste intention of the other, and he saw in that act not the conjunction of their bodies but the diversity of their minds. There were two persons involved, but only one committed adultery.\(^{45}\)

The Frate advises the Christian Lucrezia that, since her will does not approve, she should willingly sleep with the stranger.

Timoteo does not differ from the other conspirators with respect to the conscience. Siro seems to have none: he'd enjoy seeing Nicia cuckolded as long as the dupers are not caught (II, 4). Nicia never mentions his conscience. He regrets having to harm the young man but is mainly concerned with discovery by The Eight, the Florentine criminal tribunal. Ligurio has no regrets before or after his trick. And Callimaco, though he briefly wonders whether he'll be punished in the hereafter, decides, like Castruccio Castracani, that there are many good people in hell (IV, 1).\(^{46}\) As in Machiavelli's more serious works, nothing need burden the conscience if one is not discovered in an immoral act. Only the imprudent have need of repentence.

Timoteo prefers another *favola* to demonstrate that "the end is to be regarded in all things" (III, 1). This, of course, is a precept Machiavelli puts forth in *The Prince* while denying that there is any higher judgment for consciences to look to (P. XVIII). The Frate's "end" is, as usual, quite different from the end to which Christians look. Timoteo cites the story of Lot's daughters in Genesis and argues that they were not disobedient to God and should not be blamed. Rather, they acted prudently, sacrificing their personal virtue for another end: the good, the advantage, of the greatest number. Lucretia has already told her mother that nothing could justify the adultery to her, even if she were responsible for the continuation of the whole human race (III, 10). Her confessor assures her that, "because their [Lot's daughters'] intention was good, they did not sin" (III, 11). He glibly approves of an act which
Biblical commentaries are reticent to discuss. Even if Genesis does not condemn the daughters, the narration is careful not to exonerate them.

In his depiction of Timoteo, Machiavelli takes liberties with the Christian Bible as well as with the Hebrew. His new preacher is not like the members of "new orders" like the Franciscans and Dominicans (D. III, 1) who try to return to the original principles of their religion. Nor are his ends those of Savonarola who attempted, but failed, to restore Christian faith through "new modes and orders" (P. VI). On the contrary, Machiavelli’s new preacher seems to reject what his own religion stood for in its beginnings. This may be indicated in his name, which appears to be more than an ironic joke about his failure to honor God. In the New Testament, Timothy is the recipient of two letters from Saint Paul, who describes him elsewhere: "I have no one like him who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served me in the Gospel." Paul recognizes in Timothy a young man who will take up the Apostle’s mission now that Paul is approaching his own end. What does Paul expect from the Timothies who will follow him? Most of the first Epistle is devoted to the problems of church administration and the behavior of clerics. It also speaks at length of the modesty of women, especially of widows like the one Timoteo counsels in his first appearance. Although woman transgressed, she “will be saved through bearing children if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” Finally, the letter contains the famous warning that “love of money is the root of all evils.”

Machiavelli is well aware of the “evils” which originate in avarice, but his depiction of Timoteo and his discussions in the political writings make clear the differences between his attitudes and Paul’s.

From his first appearance, to the last scene of the play, Timoteo is depicted in the act of receiving money. The Frate’s desire for private wealth is not emphasized, for reasons discussed below, but the likely abuse of the responsibility to collect money for others is evident to Machiavelli, who repeatedly refers to the prominent place of greed in human nature. He is deeply critical of teachings and institutions which do little to mitigate the evils of human nature while ineffectively exhorting men to purify themselves in anticipation of
The Frate's position shows what Machiavelli sees as a tension between prescriptions of otherworldliness and poverty on the one hand, and the injunction to minister to one's flock on the other. He also thinks that "love of money" need not be the "root of all evils." The Frate's aim is clearly money, but in this play its use is not specified. Timoteo's continuing personal "good" depends on the "good" of his parishioners, and so he aims at a Machiavellian arrangement of mutual self-interest: some of the money will be used to maintain belief by acts of charity. Thus Machiavelli suggests that Timoteo's "love of money" may result in some "goods,"—though not in Paul's sense—as well as evils. The same would be even more true of unfettered political leaders in uncorrupt states. While avoiding the amassing of private fortunes and the concomitant growth of faction, luxury, and indolence, a prudent leader can guide his state to glory and power by the judicious management of money and men's love for it.

Mandragola should also be read in conjunction with Paul's second Epistle to Timothy:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people. For among them are those who make their way into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Machiavelli's Timothy is an instrument and ally of "such people" and he knowingly ignores the Epistle's advice to the soldiers of God "not to get entangled in civilian pursuits."51

Machiavelli gives us revised versions of characters from old books. Perhaps his boldest innovation is his presentation of an unholy family in the act of conception. Instead of a divine lover who "took our infirmities, bore our diseases" by fathering a baby,52 we see a cunning "doctor" visit a chaste wife's bed at night under cover of the grotesque mandragola story, leaving the participants feeling "reborn" the next morning. In Machiavelli's renaissance and renewal, men who know this world rely on themselves alone, not on hopes of being saved.53
Those who believe that Machiavelli was a believing Christian will question the identification of Timoteo with his creator. Such readers might protest that the distortions of religion by a stage character are not Machiavelli's and that the author is attacking only institutional corruption and not the principles of the religion itself. They might remind us that thoughtful readers of dramatic dialogue always assume that no character is speaking for the author; relaxing this assumption would be like attributing to Molière the casuistic blasphemies of Tartuffe, something Molière goes to great lengths to deny in his defensive and moralistic preface to that play. But, as we have seen, Machiavelli is curiously unassertive about the conventional moral lessons to be drawn from this play. He does not claim—because he cannot—as Molière does, that he has removed all that might confuse good with evil.\(^4\)

Like Ligurio, Timoteo is introduced as a familiar stock character. But just as the conventional parasite metamorphoses into a version of Machiavelli’s capitano, Timoteo turns out to be like Machiavelli’s projected preacher for Florence. The “frate mal vissuto” of the Prologue is not presented as an evil and disgusting example to alienate the audience. Compared to his brother friars in the works of Machiavelli’s contemporaries, Timoteo is remarkably reserved. For example, there is no indication that the Frate enjoys luxurious food and clothing, or women, and he is scrupulous about performing his formal duties. Productions which present him as a repulsive sensualist who paws Lucrezia, misunderstand Machiavelli’s intent. He is not like Boccaccio’s Frate Alberto, as Meredith thought, nor is he an Italian model for Tartuffe: “The Frate Timoteo of this piece is only a very oily Friar compliantly assisting an intrigue with ecclesiastical sophisms (to use the mildest word) for payment.”\(^5\) As we have seen, he is shrewder and more self-controlled than the usual Tartuffes, and as a result, he is a far greater threat to the religion he professes; for, like Ligurio, what he really wants is not bodily pleasure, but money and the satisfaction of manipulating his fellow men.

Although Machiavelli is amused at his friar’s hypocrisy, and recognizes that the Frate is used by better men, he does share the credo articulated by Ligurio and affirmed by the Frate. This is evident from the Song about trickery which immediately follows Timoteo’s long discussion with Lucrezia in Act Three. The Song is
Machiavelli's: it comes between the acts as a comment on the action. The remainder of this essay will be devoted to Machiavelli's role as a teacher of youth and to his use of comedy as a vehicle to instruct the audience in the ways of Timoteo and Ligurio.

III. COMEDY AND THE YOUNG

Like the Platonic Socrates and like Saint Paul, Machiavelli is, in his political writings, self-conscious and explicit about his relationship to the young. His aim is to substitute his teachings of "new modes and orders" for the teachings of earlier writers. The Prince and the Discourses are written treatises. Although they differ in form, magnitude and emphasis, they are alike in that they are books with public subjects which are addressed to readers who will study them privately. The busy young ruler to whom Machiavelli dedicates The Prince will read this short terse handbook and learn the Machiavellian mode of acquiring and maintaining a state. The longer and more rambling Discourses are dedicated to two friends of the author, young gentlemen worthy to be princes, who will peruse the volumes at their leisure. Machiavelli's stated intention is to inspire these readers to carry his project to its "destined place" (D. I, pref.). In the Introduction to the second book, he hopes to excite the minds of the young who will outlive him:

For it is the duty of a good man to teach others that good which, through the malignity of the times and of fortune, he has not been able to perform; so that, many capable ones hearing of it, some of them, more loved by heaven, might be able to perform it. (D. II, intro.)

These political books are also, in a way, about the young, since youth and vigor, although they do not guarantee virtù, are likely to be accompanied by it. Machiavelli says that Fortune, which always figures in the outcome of events, is "the young man's friend" (P. XXV), and he admires "those who had the honors of triumph when very young men" (D. I, 60).

Mandragola differs from the treatises in being a publicly presented work with a private subject. The hostile Prologue, as Guicciardini suggested, says more about the author than about his audience,
and cannot be considered a dedication. But the identity of this audience is of the utmost importance in understanding Machiavelli’s intent. Insofar as Mandragola has the same aim as the political writings, it too is addressed to the young, to those who are not yet fully formed. Machiavelli’s audience is composed of young gentlemen, like Buonelmonte and Rucellai of the Discourses, who frequented the social and cultural gatherings in the courts and great houses of Italian cities. In Urbino they participated in soirées of the sort depicted in Castiglione’s Courtier; in Florence they gathered for discussions with Marsilio Ficino in the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici or, more recently with Machiavelli himself in the Rucellai gardens. And they attended productions of Roman and contemporary plays like those patronized by the Duke of Ferrara, or presented at various celebrations, like the wedding of Lucrezia Borgia.

Mandragola is not intended directly to reach the public at large. But the particular coterie to whom the play is addressed is one whose attitudes and future actions will have the greatest effect on the wider community. For these elite young gentlemen are the future princes, or in the right circumstances, the future republican leaders of Italy. The circumstances under which Machiavelli wrote make all his writings “political” events. What he says must always be considered in the context of what he could say. It is thus necessary to pay the utmost attention to the sources to whom he attributes his teachings, that is, to the dramatic “characters” in his political books. The genre of Mandragola makes it the most public of his attempts to teach the young.57 It also permits Machiavelli to say everything, for in a drama, the author himself says nothing.

Machiavelli’s concern with the young is especially evident in The Art of War, which should be considered with Mandragola. Like the play, it is a dialogue in which the author never speaks. These two “dramatic” works are vehicles for the same principles Machiavelli sets forth in the political books, but their forms make these teachings more palatable, and hence, more publishable. In the lightest and in the gravest pursuits the core of Machiavelli’s teachings about justice is commonly acknowledged: all’s fair in love and war. In the political books, not published during the author’s lifetime, we learn that the true prince is as self-serving as a lover and as ruthless as a military capitano.

The Art of War is a technical handbook; its comments on
Christianity, justice, and leadership are absorbed as the reader pores over military strategems. The dialogue is clearly concerned with the young. Old Fabrizio Colonna converses in the Rucellai gardens with elite young men who will learn from him to revive ancient military practices. Like Machiavelli, Fabrizio won’t live to see the enterprise through. The youngest questioner wishes to see the imagined army in action. Fabrizio’s exchanges with him seem to parody Socrates’ discussions with other young men about an imagined city: Fabrizio’s projections are realizable.

The Art of War, like Mandragola, makes clear that love is an activity inferior to war. Cosimo Rucellai wrote love poems until Fortune would lead him to “higher activities.” The form of the dialogue seems to parallel that of Boccaccio’s Decameron: in a ravaged and suffering Italy worthy young people retire to a garden for conversation, taking turns at “absolute power.” Machiavelli’s version replaces the theme of love with that of war. There are no women in the Rucellai gardens, and the consolations of love are replaced by the remedy of military virtù.

Philosophers, poets, and political men have remarked that poetry is more suited to teach morality than is history. This is implied in Aristotle’s statement that poetry is more philosophic than history: in poetry human events occur not by chance, but as they would in a moral and rationally ordered universe. In The Advancement of Learning Francis Bacon elaborates on this view: “because true history propoundeth the success and issues of action not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed Providence...”

In the terms of his famous formula about Machiavelli, poetry depicts, not what men do, but what they ought to do. For Bacon, “poesy” is useful only as an expression of human customs, passions, and yearnings. He thus advises reading history as a practical guide for human action: “it is not good to stay too long in the theatre.” Perhaps he might consider Machiavelli’s theatre an exception. For Mandragola is effective precisely because it depicts poetically—and universally—the material Bacon assigns to history: the world as it is, not as it should be according to philosophers, poets, and preachers. Thus, we are shown what traditional morality would probably view as a deplorable but “true-to-life” situation: clever men enjoying the fruits of their immoral actions. But Bacon’s formulae, both about
history and about Machiavelli, are misleading. The greatest histories are "poetic"; they order events so as to draw universal, philosophic conclusions about them. This is true of Machiavelli’s histories, or commentaries upon history. Furthermore, like these "poetic" histories, Machiavelli’s "historical" poetry does not really abandon the attempt to set standards for human behavior. Rather, it substitutes new standards for the "merits of virtue and vice." Thus, we must explore further the poetic vehicle Machiavelli uses to make his "historical" views of human action the accepted ones.

It has been said that there is no place for tragedy in the works of Machiavelli. His views of human virtù and Fortune preclude a world where pity, fear, and the recognition of divine justice constitute the proper human attitude. But Machiavelli is at home in the comic realm, both within his political writings, and in his avowedly comic works, dramatic, narrative, and poetic. One effective way to undermine the sacred doctrines of older teachings is to refuse to recognize their seriousness. As Leo Strauss says, "If it is true that every complete society necessarily recognizes something about which it is absolutely forbidden to laugh, we may say that the determination to transgress that prohibition sanza alcuno rispetto, is of the essence of Machiavelli’s intention." But Machiavelli’s "comic" view does not fully explain the way in which the genre of Mandragola is so well suited to his project. We must now return to the question of how Machiavelli uses comedy to teach the young as they watch "un giovane" seduce "una giovane" from her older husband and from her old-fashioned morals.

A. Comedy and Morality

The greatest comedies in the western tradition tend to conserve established "modes and orders." They may be critical of particulars—of timely fashions, government policies, the pretenses of the professions, the rigidity of age and authority—but they usually end by affirming the traditional teaching about virtues and vices which the older generation seeks to pass on to the young. Thus, in one type of intrigue plot the young lover and his supporters conspire to defeat or circumvent an opponent (often older) who would "usurp" the lover’s place and interfere with his desires. New information, chance, the ability of the intriguers, and the stupidity of the opponents, accomplish what the audience recognizes as the appropriate and
better arrangement: the enemies of youth are defeated, either reformed and reconciled, or punished and expelled. But youthful exuberance and passion must also accept limits, and so moral virtue is not really questioned. Individual elders may err, comically and with consequences, but the old morality emerges intact. A more satirical intrigue plot presents a conspiracy of clever rogues who prey on equally vicious or on foolish dupes. Here, too, the action may imply serious criticism of the established values and authorities, but, in the end, the play demonstrates the nonviability of deviations from the life of virtue. In the plays of Aristophanes, Plautus, Terence, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Molière, these two intrigue plots—with modifications and variations—occur repeatedly. In them deviants may be loved and enjoyed, and even ambivalently admired, but eventually they are exposed and perhaps punished, and the rightful order is restored.

But this conservative effect is easily lost—through artistic shortcomings or by design. As a result, moral authorities have always been suspicious of the youthful intrigues of comic drama. Not necessarily, but not infrequently, comedy has been justly charged with subverting morality. The remainder of this essay will examine how changes in the traditional elements of intrigue plots enable Machiavelli to exploit some subversive tendencies of comedy in order to convey his truly subversive teachings. His intrigue plot is as different from those of conventional intrigue comedies as The Prince is from the conventional “mirror of princes” books whose form it resembles. Machiavelli’s writings, both comic and serious, are still didactic, but what they teach is new.

B. Comic Conspiracies

Readers of the Discourses know that Machiavelli thought carefully about what might now be called the “psychology” of conspiracies. Readers of Mandragola have recognized, in the remarks of Callimaco, Ligurio, and Timoteo, key maxims of Machiavelli’s teachings about conspiracy. The early acts of the play depict the formation of the conspiracy as new members are added. In comedy Machiavelli employs an appropriate vehicle for his teachings because comedy often works by effecting a “conspiracy” outside the play, as well as within it. Bergson’s suggestion that laughter functions as a “social gesture,” assumes that members of an audience in a theatre feel a
common bond as they identify with some characters on stage and laugh at others: "laughter always implies a kind of secret free-masonry, or even complicity with other laughers." The nature of the conspiracies which a playwright establishes (1) among the characters, (2) among the spectators, and (3) between the spectators and the characters on stage, is responsible for whether the play will have a conservative or subversive effect on the morality of those spectators.

The comic theatre can be, as Bergson suggests, an institution which restricts immoral or unsocial deviations, as do the plots described above. On the other hand, comedy shares the power of all drama to make the audience identify with the characters imitated on stage—even if they would condemn them in real life. Thus, as Rousseau feared, stage imitations have a special ability to undermine morality:

Let us dare say it without being roundabout. Which of us is sure enough of himself to bear the performance of such a comedy without halfway taking part in the deeds which are played in it? Who would not be a bit distressed if the thief were to be taken by surprise or fail in his attempt? Who does not himself become a thief for a minute in being concerned about him? For is being concerned about someone anything other than putting oneself in his place? A fine instruction for the youth, one in which grown men have difficulty protecting themselves from the seductions of vice! Is that to say that it is never permissible to show blamable actions in the theatre? No; but in truth, to know how to put a rascal on the stage, a very good man must be the author.

The tendency to be "drawn into" the play is especially strong in intrigue comedies because the spectator is so often invited to identify with a successful group, rather than with an outstanding but isolated and doomed individual, as in tragedy. This suggests that comedy is capable of both greater social and moral "affirmation" (the spectator vicariously participates in the group reconciliation and celebration of accepted values), and greater "subversion" (the spectator identifies with a group that successfully celebrates its rejection of those values).

Returning now to the play itself, we can see that Machiavelli's views about human nature and politics are responsible for his revisions of the conventional conspiracy plot. These revisions are, in turn, responsible for differences in audience response, and, thus, for the Machiavellian subversion. This is evident in his depiction of the
intriguer's and their success, and his depiction of the duped—the objects of the intrigue—as well.

In his comic intriguer's, Machiavelli makes attractive what would ordinarily be condemned as immoral. Callimaco is young, handsome, vigorous, and intelligent. Macaulay's objections to the comedies of Wycherly and Congreve is apt here, since the writers for the English Restoration stage sometimes used—or abused—some of the same comic elements as Machiavelli. Referring especially to their subversive attitudes towards "conjugal fidelity," Macaulay argues that "...morality is deeply interested in this, that what is immoral shall not be presented to the imagination of the young and susceptible in constant connection with what is attractive."68 "Conservative" comedies often present an attractive young hero who embraces immoral schemes to satisfy immoral desires. But, as I shall suggest below, in these comedies our potential sympathy for such actions and passions gradually undergoes a metamorphosis. For example, either the hero's (and our sympathetic) initial fancy or lust is discredited by laughter or punishment, or it is controlled and transformed into a more spiritual and a legally sanctioned love. Neither of these things happens in Mandragola.

Machiavelli's conspirators defy a distinction often made in comedies between "well- or ill-intentioned" rogues.69 They most resemble the sympathetic schemers of a plot like that of Cassina/Clizia. However, in Mandragola, the young dupers are not the rightful opponents of a would-be usurper, but, as I have suggested, the usurpers themselves. Thus, like Volpone and Mosca in Jonson's play, they are underminers of morality. The merging of the two intrigue plots described above and exemplified here by Cassina and Volpone, leads the audience to approve of Machiavelli's attractive conspirators. There is no conventional "poetic justice" in Mandragola. According to Machiavelli, justice is not a primary consideration, except insofar as it too might contribute to success. Machiavelli's rogues are eminently successful and thus are never exposed and punished. Their success, as I have suggested, depends on their benefiting others. Thus, although the conspirators are subverters of morality, they are not conventionally vicious, that is, ill-intentioned.70 If comedy supports morality by making us angry at (or at least contemptuous of) the right things—by sharpening our sense of justice—Machiavelli's comedy deliberately undermines morality. We experience nothing like
our desire to see the tripping up of such arch-deceivers as Molière's Tartuffe, Jonson's Volpone and Mosca, or even more sympathetic deviants like Malvolio or Falstaff. Nor do we feel our initial relish for the intrigue turn to contempt, as we do for Boccaccio's comic (though unstaged) Frate Alberto. The conspiracy succeeds completely and there is no suggestion, like those found repeatedly in Jonson's didactic comedies, that the partners will defeat themselves.

Some readers have thought that Machiavelli's plays exhibit the successful maneuverings of clever people in order to help those who witness them learn to protect themselves. The printer of the first edition of *The Prince* suggested something similar when he sought Church protection against those who "do not know that those who instruct in the use of herbs and medicine, also instruct in poisons, in order to know how to guard against them." This would seem to be the intent of traditional moral fables like Aesop's or La Fontaine's, which often present a simplified narrated version of tricks like those in the intrigue comedies. But the fables, like some comedies, run the risk of mis-teaching—precisely because the schemer is attractive and goes unpunished. In *Émile*, Rousseau discusses the didactic effect of these stories on the "very young." According to Rousseau, the problem with La Fontaine's engaging fables is that they have the effect, if not the intention, of encouraging the young to identify with the successful fox, ant, or lion. Furthermore, since fraud is more admirable than force, when a clever gnat defeats a lion, the child's sympathies will be with the gnat. This, I believe, is the intended effect of *Mandragola*, and it is well described by Rousseau: "You are teaching them how to make another drop his cheese, rather than how to keep their own." Unlike Jonson, whose moral lesson requires the humiliation and punishment of Volpone, the Fox, Machiavelli openly advertises elsewhere (P. XVIII) that he is teaching the "virtues" of the fox (and the lion). Machiavelli's fox is, of course, much more prudent than Jonson's.

The injunction to develop subhuman characteristics is accompanied by the celebration of Chiron the Centaur, identified by Machiavelli as the teacher of Achilles (P. XVIII), and, we might add, of Asclepius the physician. Machiavelli, who in the Dedication to *The Prince*, presents himself as the teacher of princes, seems to identify his teachings with those of Chiron. The centaur makes no appearance in *Mandragola*, but he watches from the wings, directing the action
from backstage. Whether or not Machiavelli was responsible for the frontispiece of the first edition of the play (1518), the picture it bears could not be more appropriate. A centaur stands before us. In addition to the conventional strung bow on his back, this centaur bears another bow with which he plays a violin. The second bow distinguishes him from the many centaurs of classical and neoclassical art, those imprudent half-beasts who rape women and fight wars over the stolen brides of others. He is Chiron, the pupil of Artemis and Apollo, who told Peleus a cunning way to win the elusive Thetis as his lawful wife, and who later became the tutor to the son of this union. Although the author of the play was known, this first title page does not bear his name. Instead, it bears what might be considered a personal emblem. The prudent use of arms is a central theme in Machiavelli’s political writings. Here, however, the instruments of war are at rest, and the centaur concentrates on the instruments of love and of poetry, the violin (\textit{lira da bracchio}) being a modern Italian improvement on the lyre of Apollo. As I have suggested above, princes can be taught remedies for the ills of their times through plays and poetry, as well as through political writings.\textsuperscript{72}

Machiavelli’s view of human nature is responsible for differences in our attitudes towards the conventionally deceived characters, as well as towards their deceivers. In most “conservative” comedies the former are either virtuous and unjustly abused innocents, or vicious and justly abused rogues. In \textit{Volpone} the victims with whom we sympathize are superhuman personifications named Bonario and Celia. Similar characters often appear in plays whose authors emphasize their moral purpose. Even \textit{The Country Wife} has its Alithea and Harcourt, hardly superhuman, but clearly exemplary by the end of the play. \textit{Mandragola} strikingly lacks characters like these who, however pallid and weak they appear next to Jonson’s and Wycherly’s able rogues, invite allegiance because they stand for an uncorrupt morality.\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Mandragola}, as Robert Heilman remarks, “is sometimes called a satire, but it is hard to see it as such, for it includes no dramatic assertion of an alternative standard which would invite criticism of the mode of life depicted.”\textsuperscript{74} Once again, the absence of such characters is not surprising in a play by a writer who rejects the traditional exhortations to imitate the superhuman as a standard for human beings. Machiavelli also omits—and in this he
resembles Jonson—any characters who are virtuous but also intelligent and witty.\(^{75}\) Once more this suggests that intelligence means knowing how to be both moral and immoral, depending on the circumstances.

Let us now turn to the other victims of the standard intrigue plot, the rogues who are punished by superior rogues. Again, Machiavelli’s view of human nature is responsible for changes in our attitudes. Though other examples would do, *Volpone* provides an especially revealing contrast. Jonson deems the vicious duped, as well as the vicious dupers, by caricaturing them as subhuman beasts. Thus, the wicked Volpone and Mosca prey on characters named Corvino, Voltore, and Corbaccio. Again, it is not surprising that Machiavelli, the teacher of *virtù* rather than of moral virtue, never suggests that his characters are less than human, either in their moral or intellectual shortcomings. As far as I can tell, the word “*bestia*” (or its derivatives) occurs six times in the play: in reference to Callimaco’s desperate plot (I, 3), to women mismatched with inferior men (I. 3), to Lucrezia’s fanatic piety (II, 6), to Sostrata who can be counted on to convince her daughter to cooperate (III, 9), and to widows without children (III, 11), and to men without women (V, 6). In the first and fourth cases the “bestial” is embraced and put to use. In the third and last cases the term refers derogatorily to human beings who refuse to “accommodate” themselves—another frequent phrase—in order to secure their comfort and convenience in this world. Machiavelli thus inverts the traditional sense of this term as he does others.

Messer Nicia and Jonson’s Corvino both arrange for their wives’ adultery and their own cuckolding. But the naturalistic characterization and almost affectionate tone of Machiavelli’s play reveal a radical difference between the two comedies. Corvino is depicted as vicious and evil, while Nicia is shown only to be simple and lax; Corvino is punished by the Scrutineo, while Messer Nicia not only escapes notice of the Eight, but is peculiarly rewarded. Machiavelli’s neutral presentation of the anonymous Donna in Act Three, Scene One is another example of his refusal to condemn either forceful superior people or their weak inferiors as “immoral.”\(^{76}\) Human beings are neither all good nor all evil (D. I, 27). Lowering our moral expectations or standards makes us judge only in terms of *virtù*. In stage comedy, as in life, it is difficult to feel righteously hostile or
vindictive towards people who lack ability. Justice does not require the punishment of stupidity and Machiavelli mutes Nicia's moral shortcomings. Thus, we only laugh at Nicia's simplicity. If ability and aptness to succeed are all that matter, we will support the conspiracy of the able.

C. Comic Misrule: Roman Comedy

One way in which many comedies depict the overthrow of the sanctioned rules of society without subverting these "modes and orders" by audience complicity in the overthrow, is to indicate clearly the temporary character of the upset. The conventional "comedies of misrule" are related, however distantly, to medieval Feasts of Fools and Saturnalian carnivals, whose function was to serve as an outlet and, ultimately, to preserve the order and hierarchy of everyday moral life. This conservative function helps explain why they were sanctioned by Roman officials and, later, though more uneasily, by the Church. Machiavelli seems to have given some thought to the political uses and consequences of carnival and its absence. But his play differs greatly from Roman and Shakespearean comedies which allowed nonparticipating spectators to experience vicariously the release which the older festivals had provided. The nymphs and shepherds in the first song of Mandragola emphasize the permanence of their withdrawal from serious pursuits. As I have argued, the play which follows emphasizes a similar permanent "release" from the restrictions of ancient morality and the Church. A brief look at the Roman plays from which Mandragola is superficially descended will demonstrate what a distant grandchild Machiavelli's play really is.

In Plautus and Terence there is much that is racy and vulgar, and the plays are populated with those engaged in irregular sexual pursuits. But the reader will find few plays which inherently undermine the strict Roman morality of the audience that watched it. Once again, chastity and grave Roman women serve as a gauge. Virgins do not appear on stage; habitual sexual license is limited to courtesans and their pimps; rapes are committed but there are mitigating circumstances; maidens remain miraculously intact or are overcome only by force and are often married when their true identity is discovered. Young people who defy their elders—even when they are justified by the folly of these elders—are reconciled
with them and recognize their authority. They often ask for pardon or forgiveness, thus admitting their misbehavior. Young men grow out of their impulsive yielding to nature, and become responsible husbands, fathers, and senators. Slaves may trick their masters, but they don’t demand their freedom; there are reminders that they may be punished after the plays end. The dramas are only brief releases from the stringent moral codes of Roman life, and rarely fail to affirm accepted notions of piety, filial duty, chaste conjugal love, and friendship. As Duckworth says, “the plots are basically moral; the good are rewarded and villainous or lustful characters (leno, miles, senex amato) are punished . . . all this is not very edifying, perhaps, but neither is it harmful to the morals of the spectators.”

Furthermore, the plays avoid the danger of corruption or more than a temporary desire for “misrule” in the spectators, by not presenting a too-naturalistic world with which these spectators might identify. They are set far from Rome in a place infamous for license. The characters are, for the most part, stock stage types rather than naturalistic individuals, and the language, too, is conventional and removed (music and verse). In contrast, as Carlo Goldoni recognized, the power of Mandragola lies in its naturalism. It was precisely this powerful naturalism in the service of dubious actions which made the admiring young Goldoni uncomfortable—even as he resisted his father’s ire for reading such literature. To those who would protest that the action Machiavelli’s play presents is limited to the make-believe world of the stage, we might remember Macaulay’s reply to Lamb’s apology for the English Restoration playwrights: Machiavelli’s setting is the audience’s Florence, the people are recognizable, the language is natural, and “one hundred little touches make the fictitious world look like the actual world.”

Perhaps these generalizations about Roman comedy are more consistently applicable to Plautus, but they also describe most of Terence’s plays as well. The one Latin comedy which most resembles Mandragola is Terence’s Eunuch, in which a carefully plotted rape is described in all its ugliness and even rationalized before the situation is saved by the conventional marriage. The play ends with an “adulterous” ménage-à-trois of a prostitute, her lover, and a bragart soldier who will unsuspectingly support them. Like Mandragola, The Eunuch seems to defy the conventional morality: it presents approvingly, situations which make us vaguely uncomfortable even as
we comply with the request for applause at the end. Perhaps our discomfort is provoked by the inclusion of all the unpleasant details of the action. It is hard to know what Terence intended in *The Eunuch*; the play may be an interesting failure. But Machiavelli's play *intends* to divide us from our conventional assumptions. To do this it must avoid recognizing the unpleasant implications of its action. Its artistic—though not moral—superiority is indicated by our feeling *little* discomfort at the end. Interestingly, as Elder Olson points out, Terence's failures to remain within the comic limits are related to his "tendency to humanize the characters," that is, to naturalize.

D. *Commedia Erudita*

Many of the plays of Machiavelli's contemporaries adhered more closely than *Mandragola* does to the Roman plots discussed above. Others added to the more familiar settings and characters, new plots of cuckoldry and adultery, like those found in the popular novellas. From these plays one sees clearly the way in which the comic *intricce* (intrigue) plots arouse audience support for what would ordinarily be judged as base actions. One can also see how the same action is so much more vivid on stage than it is in the novella. This is not the place for a comparison of *The Decameron* and the plays derived from it, but one might begin by noting the effects of (1) the author's moral frame for the stories, (2) the individual narrator's comments, and (3) the difference between a privately read narrative account and a publicly viewed physical representation.

Although some of the *Commedia Erudita* plots have elements in common with *Mandragola*, there are important differences. As in the Roman plays, the success of *Commedia* intrigues is often due to chance. Although the plays are cheerfully lax about language and approving of adultery, there are few articulate rationales for the behavior presented. They do not consistently exclude the moral point of view. Furthermore, the rambling structures and, for the most part, stereotyped characters, undercut the audience's identification. There is something artificial and mechanical, not to say boring, about many of these plays, and this keeps an audience at its distance. Because they are artistically inferior to *Mandragola*, they are less successful at undermining traditional values.
E. The Comic Project: Conclusion

There are still other ways in which Machiavelli encourages the acquiescence of the audience in his "new case." In addition to amplifying our complicity in the plot and removing all suggestions that its values are temporary fictions, Machiavelli prepares us to accept his premises by offering more shocking notions in order to get us to accept less shocking ones. We, like Timoteo, are tested by the proposed abortion plan which is then withdrawn. Mandragola is substituted for the abortion medicine and, like the Frate, we abandon abortion and accept adultery. However, one might wonder whether, once chastity, conjugal fidelity, honesty, and the other virtues which Machiavelli turns to matters of prudential judgment elsewhere, are reduced to mere "fables," one shouldn't accept the practical arguments Ligurio makes in favor of abortion as well. Given the principles of action and "conscience" articulated in the play, one also wonders whether any but a prudential argument would stand up against really killing a vagrant lute player if this would further the purpose of the conspirators. If the power of mandragola were not a fiction, and Callimaco and many others would benefit from one unfortunate sacrifice, Machiavelli's play might seem to sanction such a murder.

But Mandragola is effective precisely because it only implies the most unseemly consequences of the action. When the Machiavellian principles are put forth in The Prince, readers are shocked and repelled. But comedy, by convention, is permitted to treat the most serious matters lightly. Comedy laughs at everything, and the audience laughs too. The same immoral teachings, now exhibited in the private, as well as the public, realm are less shocking. But, as Machiavelli says in "Discourse about Our Language," the concealed serious lessons of comedy are tasted only after the laughter in the theatre has stopped. In Mandragola these new lessons are "underneath" the ancient comic form and come into focus when viewed alongside the ancient historic subject. Machiavelli does well not to call attention, in this play, to the conventional didactic purpose of comedy, because what he has to teach is far from conventional; it is truly "a new case born in this city." In the Prologue, the alienated author says that he hopes "you will be tricked [ingannate]" as Lucrezia was. This seems to apply to the ladies in the audience. But by the end we all have been taken in, and by taking us into the plot,
the author insures that we have been taken in by his teachings. Machiavelli, the formidable capitano in a new campaign against the old teachings, is an articulate “preacher” of the “verità effettuale.” As the most eloquent “seducer” in his comedy Mandragola, he administers a remedy for the illness of the “present age.”

1 Niccolò Machiavelli, Letter to Guicciardini (October 16-20, 1525), Lettere, a cura di Franco Gaeta, Milano, 1961, p. 438.
2 Ibid., p. 439.
3 Ibid., pp. 439-40.
4 For introductory surveys of contemporary Italian comedy see Marvin T. Herrick, Italian Comedy in the Renaissance (Urbana, Illinois, 1960) and Douglas Radcliff-Ulmstead, The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy (Chicago, 1969).
5 P. ded., XV, XXVI and D. ded., I intro., II intro., III 1.
6 D. I intro. refers to sculpture, law, medicine, and government. One wonders why he omits drama. Elsewhere one of his speakers says, “This land seems to be born to raise up dead things, as she has in poetry, painting and in sculpture.” See “The Art of War,” in Machiavelli, The Chief Works and Others, trans. Allan Gilbert (Durham, North Carolina, 1965), II, 706. See also “History of Florence,” Chief Works, III, 1233.
7 See also P. VI. These and other passages suggest that Machiavelli considers himself a political founder of some sort.
11 The story of Lucretia is told also by Ovid in The Fasti for February 24, and by Boccaccio in his De Claris Mulieribus, with which Machiavelli might have been familiar. Variants of the incident are found in contemporary works like Boccaccio’s Decameron (II, 9). English readers will know Shakespeare’s version of Lucretia and will recognize it as the source of the subplot of Cymbeline which refers to it explicitly. But in Boccaccio’s story and in Shakespeare’s play, the woman is not actually taken. The name of Machiavelli’s heroine points to Livy’s Lucretia rather than Boccaccio’s, despite similar elements.
13 Livy, I, 201.
14 Leo Strauss suggests that Machiavelli named him after the Athenian general, Nicias, whose Sicilian campaign failed, in part, because of his superstition. In discussing this general, Machiavelli does not explicitly mention this quality. See Thoughts on Machiavelli (Seattle, 1969), p. 284; Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, VII, 50 ff. and 86; and D. I 53 and III 16.
The songs were composed for a production of the play at Faenza or Modena in 1526. Unlike some readers, I assume that Machiavelli considered them relevant to the play, despite their later composition.

16 Theodore Sumberg, "La Mandragola: An Interpretation," The Journal of Politics (XXIII, 1961), 322. This article came to my attention after most of the present essay was written. Sumberg takes the play seriously and reads it in the context of Machiavelli's other works. However, by drawing too close analogies between the play and the political works, he fails to explain adequately the function of the drama for Machiavelli. Nevertheless, he touches on many key issues.

17 See, for example, Plautus' Phormio. In some of the Roman plays the clever slave or parasite seems to personify reason in the service of his master's passion.

18 See Mandragola (I, 1; Song after the first act; IV, 9) and Clizia (I, 2).

19 The evil quality of the plot is referred to only once by Ligurio: "As if God granted grace in evil things as well as good ones!" (II, 2). By the end of the play, it would seem that "God's grace" is irrelevant.

20 See Strauss, p. 343 (Notes) for a list of relevant passages without reference to the play.

21 P. XIX and D. III, 6.


23 Lest the reader be misled by the following discussion, the context should be noted. Machiavelli completes the sentence with a reference to an earlier chapter (II, 6) in which he discusses, not the breaking up of concluded marriages like Nicia's, but the breaking off of planned ones. See also Aristotle, Politics, 1311a, 1314b.

24 Livy, II, 145.

25 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1107a. See also the references to adultery in the discussion of justice in Book Five.


28 Augustine, Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans (I, 19), trans. Henry Bettenson (England, 1972), pp. 28-29. See also II, 17, pp. 66-67, for Augustine's comments on the rape of the Sabines.


32 As Erich Auerbach says, Boccaccio also exalts a new doctrine of "love and nature" over the medieval ethic of love as "the mother of all virtue and everything noble in man." But Boccaccio's rejection of the medieval view is inadequate because the new order he substitutes for it is incomplete. See "Frate Alberto," Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, New York, 1953), pp. 177-203. Read by itself, Mandragola elaborates the Boccaccian view of love and nature, as opposed to the Christian courtly ethic. Read in conjunction with the political books, the play is
part of a complete replacement, applicable to all realms of human experience.

33 Lettere, pp. 402-05.
34 See Part III.
35 Matthew 12:35.
36 Letter to Guicciardini (May 18, 1521), Lettere, p. 409.
37 See P. VI and D. II, 2 and III, 27.
38 Matthew 19:12.
39 See D. I intro. and II, 2.
41 Clizia (II, 3). In the extant version of Mandragola the Frate does not pray for a miracle for Lucrezia, nor is there any suggestion of sexual misbehavior.
42 Raphael accompanies Tobias (in the Apocryphal book of Tobit) when he goes to claim Sarah as his wife. Raphael tells Tobias to burn the heart and liver of a fish to save himself from her demon lover Asmodeus, who has killed each of her seven other husbands on their wedding nights. This remedy drives away the demon and makes possible Tobias' marriage. In a prayer of thanksgiving, Tobias emphasizes his sincerity and denies any lustful desires. See Tobit: 2-9.
43 Matthew 5:48.
44 See in contrast, Nicia's instinctive rejection of "sugar and vinegar" in II, 6.
45 City of God (I, 19), p. 29.
47 Philippians 2:22.
48 1 Timothy 2:15.
49 1 Timothy 6:10.
50 2 Timothy 3:1.
51 2 Timothy 2:4.
52 Matthew 7:17; John 3:16.
53 See the language of the Exhortation which ends The Prince (XXVI).
54 Preface to Tartuffe: "...from one end to the other, he [Tartuffe] says not one word, performs not one action, which does not depict to the spectators the character of a wicked man and which does not bring out that of the true man of good whom I oppose to him." See note 73.
56 Letter to Guicciardini (December 26, 1525), Lettere, p. 447.
57 For a vivid depiction of the seductive effect of Machiavelli (and of those he seems to approve) on a promising and impressionable youth, see Maurice Samuel's engrossing novel, Web of Lucifer (N. Y., 1947). Somerset Maugham's Then and Now (N. Y., 1947) also conveys this quality. Maugham's novel makes Machiavelli the protagonist in a plot adapted from Mandragola's. The best discourse I have read about Machiavelli's intentions with respect to the young is Leo Strauss's Thoughts on Machiavelli.
The Italian word order in the Prologue draws attention to the youth of the protagonists more than most English translations do.


65 Shakespeare, although he wrote one Plautian comedy, departed from the Latin models and developed his own comic forms. In this essay, I have tried to use for comparisons examples from comedies of the Latin type—Plautus, Terence, and the Commedia Erudita, which Machiavelli knew, and, despite their ambiguities, plays of Jonson and Moliere.


70 There is a corresponding collapse of the traditional classification of rulers at the beginning of The Prince. Machiavelli does not distinguish regimes according to whether they exist for their own or for their subjects' benefit, but according to modes of acquisition.


72 For a discussion of this frontispiece, and whether Machiavelli had authorized the first edition, see Roberto Ridolfi, Studi Sulle Commedie del Machiavelli (Pisa, 1968), pp. 25 ff. Ridolfi speculates about the date and place of publication, the decorative border, and the title, but does not mention the picture.

73 Although this is not the place for such a discussion, one could argue that Tartuffe and Volpone are in fact deeply critical of Christian religion. But if Moliere and Jonson have inherited even part of the Machiavellian view, they present it more warily. These plays may be critical of Christian values, but they are careful not to hold up for emulation the behavior which undermines those values.


75 Shakespeare's comedies, which I take to be the greatest of "conservative" comedies, abound in attractive, intelligent characters who are also "moral." Such characters distinguish these masterpieces from the heavy-handed didacticism of eighteenth-century English sentimental comedy.

76 See the discussion of this Donna in Singleton, "Machiavelli and the Spirit of Comedy."

77 The best discussions I know on this subject are in C. L. Barber,


79 Many of the early Commedie Erudite continued the Roman practice of not showing the virgin on stage. Machiavelli translated Woman of Andros, which had no virgo, and, in Clizia, calls attention to the fact that the audience won't see the contested girl. Appropriately, Mandragola boldly exhibits the girl, only to transform her original from chaste matron to adulterous wife—a category which does not exist in Roman drama, but which is standard fare in Boccaccio and some contemporary comedies.

80 Jonson's Alchemist, despite its controversial ending, pays lip service at least, to the need to pardon and forgive the wrongdoer. Whether the contrite admission of guilt is to be taken seriously is too long a question to discuss here.


83 Macaulay, p. 414. Machiavelli's care to make this world familiar to his audience is often undone by translators who attempt to substitute contemporary equivalents to make it familiar to their own. Unless the whole play is rewritten, this practice would seem to obscure Machiavelli's intentions.


85 See Olson, pp. 82-85, for a discussion of this play.

86 Olson, p. 84. See also Goldoni on Mandragola.

87 Mandragola contains strikingly less obscenity, both in language and gesture, than most Roman or contemporary Italian plays. Bawdy language and overt sexuality are not necessarily indications of a corrupting influence.
VOLITIONAL ANTICIPATION AND POPULAR WISDOM IN DESCARTES

RICHARD B. CARTER

Introduction

In his 1759 *Discours Préaliminaire de L'Encyclopédie*, D'Alembert reminds us that Descartes is a teacher of revolutionaries and a founder of the best and most just social order the world has ever seen. He identifies this as Descartes' major contribution to philosophy, and says it outweighs all the contributions of his illustrious successors. He then immediately continues his notice on Descartes by identifying him as the discoverer of the method of "indeterminates" in science—that is, as the discoverer of the way to apply analytic mathematics to the solution of physical problems. This present paper attempts to show how these two contributions are related. The one contribution is the foundation of a new social order which is more just than any before it. The other, mathematical, contribution is thus the offering of the man who is also the profound investigator of the relation between the freedom of the will—where volition is a mental power—and the determination of volition by knowledge (*Meditatio IV*); the mathematical contributor is also the investigator of the epistemological grounds for philosophic optimism concerning the possibility that each man, if he will only exercise "sa raison"—his own reason—can arrive at truth both in the sciences and in the conduct of life. (*Meditatio III, IV*)

In the first section of this paper, we will examine Descartes' method of "indeterminates" in science, so far as that method bears on his doctrine of free will and the determinateness of knowledge. In the second section, (pp. 84 ff.) we continue with a close analysis of Descartes' concept of "the objective reality of an idea," and then consider (p. 91) how that concept relates to his central doctrine that the excess of the extent of free will over understanding is the principal source of human error. This leads us (p. 93) to his

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arguments concerning his grounds for holding that, since it is not possible that man could be created so as necessarily to err, he must have within him means for correcting his errors—and thus, he must necessarily possess the means to nullify the consequences of that excess of will over understanding. We end this argument by attempting to show (p. 95) how this development implies a doctrine which D'Alembert does well to characterize as being revolutionary.

I. The Method of “Indeterminates”

An oddity which is characteristic of Descartes' thought is that he begins by doubting, first, the existence of his own body. Then he doubts whether anything he sees is true, whether his memory is not false, even whether he has senses, and whether he has not perhaps made up his ideas of body, figure, extension, movement, and place. He proceeds only subsequently to what is generally considered by others to be rather more doubtful and obscure—the existence of God. Analysis—which he tells us (VII, 156, 21-26) is the method of his Meditationes—proceeds by examining how effects are related to their causes. Hence, until those initially unknown causes are determined by analysis, their effects are no less doubtful as effects of obscure or unknown causes than their very causes. The orders of knowledge and experience are inverses of one another and what is immediately given is regarded by Descartes as what is questionable, that is, as the undetermined effect of something sought for. Descartes seeks the first principles of all phenomena which, in his hands, are reduced entirely to causes. For Descartes, a principle is a cause. His thinking, and that of the age following him, is characteristically that of the medical clinician.

In Part I of Les Passions, the reader sees that for Descartes the soul has the power of attending to, of noticing, one of its perceptions rather than any other and that this power, the soul's primary active power, is at the root of the soul's ability to represent things to itself in one way rather than another and therefore to connect this or that perception with this or that passion. The perception, itself, e.g., of light, is, as we read in Dioptriques as well, a “naturally instituted” perception of a motion in the pineal gland—primarily that motion inaugurated by rays of spirits coming from pores whose anterior ends
are the ends of the optic nerves in the back of the eye-ball. Now, the
dreams of sleep are visible to the sleeper; hence, for Descartes, they
are nothing more and nothing less than the result of a commotion in
the spirits of the brain caused by a more or less serious dysfunction
in some part of the viscera, e.g. caused by acute indigestion and
alcohol. But, what of the "visions of young men" and the "dreams
which old men dream" which, alone, make any amelioration of the
human condition possible—even medical progress? For that immense-
ly sober man, Descartes, who thinks he explains the Roman Catholic
mystery of transubstantiation by means of his own theory of
alimentation, any perception, be it a vision of the young or a dream
of the old, is the result of a perturbation of the pineal gland; if that
vision and that dream is in any way noticed, this is because of a
perturbation of the pineal gland and that perturbation of the pineal
gland can be caused only by those streams or rays of spirit which, at
some time, initially issued forth from the pores in the interior of the
brain. For Descartes, there is no other way. The structure of the
body is the precondition for visions as well as vision (just as the
conformation of the parts of a heaven are the precondition for its
light).

Descartes has said of the soul, (Regulae XII, X, 415): "but still,
there is nothing else to be found in corporeal things altogether
similar to it" (neque enim in rebus corporeis aliquid omnino huic
simile invenitur). In considering vision, we can see an instance of this
uniqueness of the soul. For the soul has the power both of
perception as well as of representing to itself things which it has
never seen and which it knows it has never seen. It can, as it were,
"see" the unseen in so far as it can represent to itself by, e.g., the
ciphers of algebra, exactly and precisely what it knows that it does
not know. That ability, it must never be forgotten, presupposes the
conformation of the body which allows it to see the ciphers which
the hand has drawn down on paper. As Descartes puts it so clearly in
Regula XVI:

it is useful to retain all not immediately relevant considerations so that they
come forth readily wherever they are needed; and for this end memory seems to
have been instituted by nature. But, since memory is often weak... the art of
writing is most aptly devised, relying on the help of which we need commit
nothing further to memory, but leaving the imagination free and whole for
present ideas, we draw whatever is to be retained on paper, and this by means of
the shortest possible symbols (notae). . . . (X, 454–55)
This ability to represent the unknown to oneself, to present it to the eye in 'symbolic' form, entails a use of the conformation of the body—involving eye, hand, bones, and blood. The pre-vision of what will be seen, but which is not present, could fairly be called the inner vision of the living human. It is likely this pre-vision which Descartes calls "the light of nature"—e.g., Meditatio III, passim. We could not have it unless we had the power to perceive the outer world which presents back to us the work of our hand as we write on paper, or of our tongues as we speak; nor could we have that pre-vision clearly and distinctly unless it could, in the future, be paired with a vision of what we pre-viewed in our pre-vision. And that pre-vision into the future presupposes the power of vision of this body organized in the way that nature has caused it to be organized from the beginning at the moment of conception.

But this power of pre-science, of knowing precisely what it is one does not know, is not magical, nor is it miraculously given us. It presupposes that the nature of things (both in so far as known, as well as merely knowable in whatever far distant future) entails an interconnectedness and order, a pro-vidential ordaining, which permits one to envisage the unknown as being expressible in terms of the already given and known. Hence, the order and method of Cartesian Analysis itself points to a true and substantial ordaining or ordering of a substantially separate subject-world—that of Analysis, Mathesis Universalis. If, that is, Analysis proceeds methodically—step by step (gradatim), rung by rung—from the given to the sought-for, then the physical world is accessible to analytical Method and thought—if and only if that very physical world is a "mediated" structure, a rational construct which is put together step by step, rung by rung (gradatim). That substantially separate physical subject-world is the product or effect of an orderly, "continuous, and nowhere interrupted motion" of matter. Descartes says just this in his Le Monde.

This designation of "medium," of the condition of mediocrity, is thus both a genetic and an epistemological term. In the latter case it refers to that which must be known in order that we can proceed from what is given to what we seek to know, from the datum to the quaesitum. It is because of the "mean" steps that what is sought is accessible, or, in the terms of the man to whom Descartes refers as "cette belle Analyste," Vieta, those mean steps are the ladder rungs upon which
men ascend from dubious effects to causes—the degree or gradus of an equation being literally the number of rungs of the ladder upon which we find ourselves in this ascent. (Descartes takes over this coinage of Vieta's whole cloth—e.g., in Regula, X, 463, 3 6 7).

In Regula XIII of the Regulae, Descartes rejects the syllogistic form of demonstration used by the so-called "Logicians" (Dialecticos); elsewhere he says that all that form is good for is the precise revelation of what one already knows, and that it is worthless for the discovery of new truths or, what is primary, for the demonstration of how new truths already arrived at were originally discovered. His own analytic method of demonstration is, however, explicitly understood by him as the method of so discovering new truths and demonstrating them, that at one and the same time this method reveals: (a) how they were discovered, (b) just what was discovered, and (c) the exact relations between which things had to be known before the solution could be discovered at all. It thus makes manifest all the steps of the demonstration—their exact number—and their mutual interconnectedness, interdependency and interrelatedness. This manifestation of the internal structure of the demonstration with respect to the multitude of factors and the order of their mutual dispositions is accomplished primarily by a way of designating the unknown terms of the problem at hand in terms of a suitable representation of the sought-after solution—or, to be more precise, by representing both the knowns and the unknowns as if they were all knowable in light of the potential solution of the problem, as if they were known hypothetically or provisionally in the dim, persistent light of the not-yet-attained but analytically represented solution sought for.

In Regula XIII, Descartes denies that he distinguished between two extreme terms and a mean term, in the way the Logicians (Dialecticos) make this distinction; rather, he considers that (X, 430, 11- 2 2): (1) "in any question, something must be unknown, for otherwise it will be sought for in vain"; (2) "the unknown ought to be uniquely designated [aliquo modo designatum], for otherwise we would not be determined on this rather than that subject of investigation"; (3) "it cannot . . . be designated uniquely except by something which is known." Consonant with this, in setting up a word-problem in algebra we designate the thing sought-for, e.g., by x, and then the other terms of the equation will be, e.g., 2x, x², x/6, or x+3, etc.

The way we represent what is unknown—i.e., in terms of what is
known (once again, see Regula XIII: X, 430, \(^{11-20}\), where Descartes says: “it cannot . . . be designated uniquely except by something which is known”)—is, so to speak, evolutionary; that is, each successive unknown quantity is “designated uniquely” by the expedient of designating it in terms of a unique expression for one particular unknown. Which particular unknown to choose does not seem to be able to be taught by method!\(^1\) The Algebraists cannot, it seems, teach the tyro how to choose what to call the “fundamental” unknown—what, as it were, to choose to express as comprising the bottom rung of the ladder between given and sought-for. To take a definite example, let us suppose that someone has $3 in nickels, dimes and quarters, with four times as many nickels as quarters and twice as many quarters as dimes; it is then to be determined exactly how many of each he has. The first step is to determine—not so much what is unknown (how many of each is what is unknown)—but the way of representing to ourselves what is unknown; then, the further information we are given for the solution of the problem (called by Descartes, the “conditions” or “tenor” of the problem) is also expressed in terms of the unknown. When this is done, then “we are determined on this rather than that subject of investigation.”

It is permissible to view the setting-up of a solution to a word-problem in analysis—including the mixture-problems of ‘lower’ analysis (or algebra), as well as the somewhat less familiar problems of the ‘higher’ analysis, or the calculus of Leibniz or Newton’s physics—as finding the means to the solution. Nor can this use of ‘means’ be called a semantic trick. ‘Ways and Means’ have always had a meaning associated with them which pointed to the figure of a bridge between where we start from, the data, and where we wish to end up, the quaesitum or question to be answered, what is sought-after.\(^2\)

To return to the word-problem just proposed—someone has $3 in nickels, dimes and quarters, with four times as many nickels as quarters, and twice as many quarters as dimes: how many of each does he have?—we let \(x\) express the number of dimes in the $3 worth of change. Then \(2x\) expresses the number of quarters. Ten times the number of dimes, or \(10x\), will express the value in pennies, i.e., the number of penny-units in \(x\) number of dimes, 25 times \(2x\) (or \(50x\)) the value of the \(2x\) quarters and, finally, since there are four times as many nickels as quarters, \(5[4(2x)]\), or \(40x\), will express the value of
the 4(2x) number of nickels. The sum of $3 will then be expressed as 300 ‘penny-units,’ so that all the terms will now be in the same unit of monetary measure. Interconnecting these expressions by means of the appropriate connection (addition), we construct the equation: 
\[10x+50x+40x=300.\]
When we perform the indicated operations and add the expressions for the unknowns together, we get 100x = 300, i.e., 300 pennies. This equation means: “100 times the sought-for number of dimes equals 300 pennies.” That is, the term, ‘300 pennies’ appears to be the analogue to the term ‘100 times the unknown number of dimes.’ (The willingness to accept such a confusion of units is, as we shall soon see, a precondition for ‘doing’ algebra and analysis.) In this last equation, we find that 100 of some quantity, represented by x, is equal to a known number of pennies (where x represents the number of dimes); then, 100 times the unknown number of dimes being considered equal to the known number of pennies, we see that the number of dimes is 3; x has been representing 3. There being 3 dimes, since there are twice as many nickles as quarters, there must be 24 nickles. Checking: 3 dimes = 30¢; 6 quarters = 150¢; and 24 nickles = 120¢. Thus, 30¢+150¢+120¢ = 300¢.

It is necessary to reflect here on the status of the term 300 occurring in the equation, 10x+50x+40x = 300, by comparing it with the term 300 in the equation 30+150+120 = 300. For, in the former case, where 300 is the sum of three unknown terms, we consider that term as known, precisely because we do not have to consider its expression in our search for that equation which will express the conditions of the problem. In that former equation, the conditions of the problem, its “tenor,” makes the quantity 300 just as much an unknown as is x, the number of dimes. Whereas, in the latter equation, 30+150+120 = 300, even were we to ask whether the sum were cast correctly, the terms on both sides of the equation would not be being put into question—only the term 300 in so far as it is the presumptive sum. In the former case involving the representations for unknowns, the term 300 is a sum of representations or, more accurately, it is a “sum” of actually unknown things represented as if they were known.

This ability we humans have to express what we do not know (the precondition for which is quite consciously knowing that we do not know it) comprises our prescience or inner light mentioned above. It
is at least very likely that Descartes' interest, not to say fascination, with order and method derives from his conviction that this analytic order and method grows out of and, indeed, manifests, the essence of, the human intellect in so far as it is capable of solving any problems whatsoever. Furthermore, it is again at least very likely that much of the Cartesian programmatic effort—culminating in the ramified Tree of Philosophy whose three highest branches were, of all things, Medicine, Mechanics, and Ethics—was directed towards a search for the ultimate roots, both physical and metaphysical, of the human ability to solve problems by analysis.

In Regula XIII, Descartes discusses the ultimate subject of such expressions 10x, 300 and the like. He says (X, 431, 3-23):

But, what is more, in order that the sought-for be grasped entirely [Sed insuper ut quaeesto sit perfecta], we wish for every thing to be so determined that nothing further is sought beyond what can be deduced from the given [ex datis]... From which it can be easily perceived how [quomodo] all the sought-for unknowns not entirely grasped [omnes quaestiones imperfectae] can be reduced to ones which are entirely grasped;... and it also appears in which way this rule ought to be observed in order to abstract a well understood difficulty from every superfluous concept [ad difficultatem bene intellectam ab omni superfluo conceptu abstrahendam], being, in this way, so reduced that we consider ourselves no further concerned with this or that subject, but only with that sort of subject [in genere] concerned with magnitudes interconnected in a certain way [circa magnitudines quasdam inter se componendas].

This "sort of subject concerned with magnitudes interconnected in a certain way" is the subject of Descartes' method—applying equally to the equation 30+150+120 = 300, (is the sum correct?), to the equation 10x+50x+40x = 300, (what is x?), and to such diverse questions as Descartes himself instances (ibid., 431), "of what sort (qualis) is the nature of the magnet?" as well as (ibid.), "likewise, if someone should ask me exactly what I might think about the nature of sound...." In his phrase, "that sort of subject concerned with magnitudes interconnected in a certain way," Descartes—specifically including both "the nature of the magnet" and "the nature of sound"—refers to the subject of questions-in-general, i.e., to the seeking concerning seeking. If this reading of Descartes is accurate and sound, "the subject of magnitudes interconnected in a certain way" does not and cannot merely refer to extended substance, res extensa, alone. Rather, that phrase must refer to res extensa as
existing in a certain qualified way, that is, as ordained to be known. But, the realm of res extensa is given to us in so far as we are merely sentient creatures. It is only when we "withdraw from our senses" by freely choosing to doubt all the evidence of the senses concerning res extensa that we thereby immediately transform that realm into another one—that of res extensa as-ordained-to-be-known (rather than merely to be sensed because of our neurophysiology). But, because this transformation requires the volitional act of the soul par excellence, doubting, it follows that this transformed realm is a world known indeterminately merely in the universal doubting of sense-evidence; and, as known indeterminately in this volitional act of doubting, we are justified in saying that it is known through "volitional anticipation." To understand that anticipation, we must next consider Descartes' doctrine of "the objective reality of an idea."

To continue with our word-problem; if we are to take the sign for equality seriously, that is, if we are to observe exactly the rule that the units on the two sides of the equality sign must be of the same kind, then, in the equation, 10x+50x+40x = 300, the number of units of which the term 300 is merely the representation must be as unknown as are the number of units of which 10x is the representation; 300 is thus no more and no less than a part of the expression of the given conditions for the solution of the problem, and it is not intended at all as a definite sum of definite units any more than are 10x, etc. Therefore, since that expression 300 can be intended as a term in the analytic representation of the conditions for the possible solution of a problem, it is theoretically impossible to distinguish that technical analytical use from the apparently ordinary use in a sum such as: 30+150+120 = 300. Or, to put this yet more sharply: For Descartes the ciphers forming the expression 3-0-0 are never intelligible outside their specific use as ways of keeping something in mind; they refer to our human ingenious attempt to solve all those problems which cannot be solved except by using those three ciphers or "symbols." (Nor should it be overlooked, concerning the specificity of the specific use of these ciphers, that algebra was known for some time as Specious Arithmetic, that is, as an arithmetic whose ciphers stood for species—presumably for species of problems which could be solved with such and such an expression. Indeed, the expressions of analysis, including such
expressions as both $300$ and $e^{xy \log x}$, are used to express nothing other than species of problems. This is the definition of analysis.) Those ciphers are analytic place-holders in the search for solutions to all of a certain class of problems; they are, as it were, an entry in the mind's lexicon of engineering-techniques.³

II. The Objective Reality of An Idea

The task of comprehending what Descartes means by his expression, "the objective reality of an idea," is difficult, as it leads the student of Descartes into a peculiarly complex thicket formed partly by the idiomatic Cartesian terminology and partly by scholarship's (usually) laudable conservatism. Concerning this notion, we find assertions on Descartes' part (IX, 62-63) concerning the fact that indivisible substance is of higher order or degree of reality than is divisible substance and hence that res extensa—although comprising one of the two substances in the universe—is of a less exalted order of being than is the other substance, res cogitans. We find, further, that the concept of an infinite substance has more reality (entitas, réalité) than does the concept of finite substance. We find, as well, that by the term, "the material falsity" of ideas, Descartes refers to the interrelation of ideas between themselves, vis à vis their rank or rung, whereas, by the term "the formal falsity" of ideas, he refers to our judgment that an idea refers to this or that which is not (usually) an idea. Indeed, our credulity is strained yet further as we find him speaking as if he means to tell us that we come to know all "outside" things which are compounds of simpler elements by means of ideas which are themselves compounds of, compounded of, other ideas, and that compound ideas have more reality than do their individual component ideas and, what is more, that, by the same token, compound things have more entity or reality than do the simpler components of which they are composed. (The only exception is God Who, alone, is an infinite unity.)

But this is, in fact, how Descartes speaks about these matters. He says that the original intellectual causes of our ideas—he calls them "patrons"—have either "formal" reality or "effective" reality—by which he seems to mean formative or effecting reality. What these patron ideas form or effect is consequent, or caused, ideas having no
more than just that amount or degree or rung of objective reality—a sort of reality which only belongs to ideas—which corresponds to the amount of formal or effective reality which belongs to their patron ideas. Likewise, in the case of, e.g., a horse whose real presence outside us occasions our idea of a horse, that idea of the horse is no less objectively real—no less real in its mode of being—than the horse of which it is the idea is itself actually or formally real—in its mode of being. The formal reality of the existent horse—in so far as that horse may be thought—measures up to, so to speak, the objective reality of my idea of that horse.

In the situation where we are considering the relation between the idea of a machine in the mind of the inventor and the machine itself, the case is only slightly different, but significantly so. For then, the existing machine which the inventor finally constructs in accordance with his idea of it is caused by his idea of it in a way very similar to that in which logical consequents are caused by their intellectual antecedents. In this case, however, the antecedent, patron, is the idea in the mind of the inventor, but the consequent, effect, is a really existent, working machine 'out there.' In this case, the craft or ingenuity of the inventor contains the formal reality whose "objective artifice" or "objective perfection," (as Descartes terms it), is that of the effective, creative, idea of the working machine when it has been built and works perfectly. And, hence, (aside from its purely physical properties), that machine borrows all its actual reality as an actively working machine from the ingenuity or artifice of its inventor-craftsman, from the real power of his mind, and thus the work effected by the machine is the ultimate effect or consequence of his idea of his machine. To determine the degree of objective reality of any idea, then, we must, in each case, determine its formal reality as well. That is to say, to grasp clearly the objective reality of any given idea, we will have to analyze it into its absolutely simplest components; then we will find one, and only one, existent—whether that be a patron idea or whether it be a truly existent something in front of us—which will have just the entity which corresponds to the objective reality of our idea—which will be, therefore, a synthetic or compound idea except in the three cases of the ideas of res extensa, res cogitans and their union. Except in the cases of these three simple ideas, all our ideas are synthetic and their objective realities are, inter se, of a higher or lower degree or rank of being, depending on the
number of constituent ideas which compose them.

An example of the present-day influence of this (apparently idiotic) Cartesian notion is to be found in our search for particular neural events which are uniquely correlative to particular consciousness-states. This most certainly is not a causal analysis across the mind-body gap; rather, it is a search for a continuous, and hence potentially synthetic, substratum for consciousness-states. Once the individual elements within that substratum have been established as being in a one-to-one functional relation to successive consciousness-states, the neo-Cartesian researcher will rest assured that the composition of the neural events, their true order and number and degree of intensity, uniquely associates one member out of a series of "physical" causes with each and every mere consciousness-state. The character or true content of individual states is beside the point; all that matters here is that a given state only occur when a given neural event occurs. What consciousness-state is to be associated with what individual neural event is theoretically (although perhaps not medically) unimportant. This is precisely what Descartes had in mind with respect to the objective reality of consciousness-states or ideas: a given idea has the reality that it does precisely because it is the final member of the unique chain of antecedents to which it belongs.

Concerning these matters, Descartes says, to begin (IX, 132):

And it follows from this that...what is more perfect, that is to say, what contains in itself more of reality, cannot be a consequence of and dependent on what is less perfect. Furthermore, this truth is not only clear and evident from the effects which have that reality called actual or formal by the philosophers, but it is also clear and evident in ideas, where one considers only the reality which they call objective...

He then instances a hot stone and its idea, and continues by saying that although that particular cause does not transmit into my idea any of its actual or formal reality, one should not thereby imagine that this cause must be less real. Rather, it should be known that every idea being a work of the mind, the nature of any idea is such that it requires for itself no other formal reality than what it receives or borrows from thought or the mind—since an idea is only a mode, i.e., a manner or way, of thinking. Now, in order that an idea contain one such objective reality rather than another, it ought, without doubt, to have it from a cause in which there is to be found at least as much formal reality as that idea contains of objective reality.... For, that manner of being objectively belongs
entirely to ideas, because of their proper nature, just as, on the other hand, the manner or fashion of being formally belongs to the causes of these ideas (at least to the first and principal ones) by their proper nature. And, although it can happen that one idea gives birth to another. . . . finally we must arrive at a first idea, whose cause must act as a patron or an original. In that patron, all the reality or perfection is contained formally and in effect which is found only objectively or by representation in the ideas stemming from it.

Thus, the objective reality of an idea is just that in the idea which, although it belongs to it as an idea, is its reality as borrowed from elsewhere. (E.g., in the terms of modern set-theory, the number \( n \) is the set of the numbers less than \( n \), so that the very "being" of that set is a dependency on its members, and not on itself, since "no set is a member of itself"; the definition which denominates a cardinal number as being a set having the same multitude of elements as a uniquely distinguished "counter-set" does the same thing, in as much as the counter-sets are these patron ideas and the natural numbers then borrow their objective reality from these!\(^5\)

To continue, then, Descartes seems to hold that each individual existent thing admits to a unique and distinct degree of reality (vide even his early Regulae: Regula VIII; X, 392, \(^{10-22}\)). We find him saying, for instance (IX, 109): "for it is self-evident that it is a greater perfection in not being divisible than in being divisible. So that, if you understand only what is quite perfect in the genus of body, that is not true at all of the true God." What can we conclude from this passage other than that soul or mind—res cogitans—is, in itself, of a higher degree of perfection than is res extensa? Furthermore, it follows from this that mind has a sufficient degree of reality, to enable it, vis à vis its notions or conceits, to be the eminent\(^6\) or formal reality from which the ideas such as we construct when we form hypotheses and conceive inventions borrow their objective reality. We have already touched upon the notion of invention. In the case of hypotheses (which are a sort of intellectual invention, one concerned, in Descartes' mind, with inventing solutions to problems), something similar follows. For, if each and every individual existent thing participates in one, and only one, degree of reality, and if the objective reality of a particular clear and distinct idea exactly corresponds, in the realm of res cogitans, to the degree of reality of its object, then, the rank of being of an hypothesis-idea—of an idea which concerns only the possible
existence of something—is determined exclusively from the parts or elements of, or the antecedents to, that idea, i.e., from what the mathematical analysts call the data or the conditions of the problem. Thus, in algebraic equations, the datum, i.e., the given, exactly equals the quaesitum, i.e., the sought-for or unknown. Indeed, it is by no means at all unlikely that Descartes’ doctrine of the objective reality of ideas is his own meta-mathematical analysis of his and Vieta’s theory of algebraic equations and transformations.

“Objective reality,” as we today use that term, is for Descartes (but not for us) the counterpart to the ideas we have, or may have, of things “outside.” For us, today, it concerns things; for Descartes, the term referred to a characteristic of ideas! More precisely, the reality or entity of things is, for Descartes, the counterpart to the objective reality of the ideas of those things. The only exception, one which has been mentioned already, is the situation of a machine and the cunning or ingenuity of the craftsman who invented it; in that case, the real machine “out there” is the objective counterpart to the objective artifice of the idea of that machine in the mind of its inventor.

Since Descartes’ time, there has been a great deal of confusion concerning his own distinction between the “objective reality of an idea” and “the objective artifice of a machine.” As we today understand the term objective reality, it is what Descartes himself would have understood as the world of artifice, the world of technological civilization—and, it seems, the created world itself, as created, i.e., as a natural or divine artifact. In that Descartes was what we might do well to call analytic, and attempted to derive the given as the logical consequence of particular and more intelligible patrons, the very world about him comes to be a sort of general objective counterpart to the particular ingenious hypotheses-ideas of his physics by means of which he tries to understand that world; and those ideas are, as analytic, characterized by their artifice. Thus, for the analytic physicist, all of objective reality (in our sense) is the counterpart to his methodically derived ideas: All of reality becomes, step by step, gradatim, the objective counterpart to the physicist’s methodically achieved analytical hypotheses. Working by means of these mathematical hypotheses, he adds to his store of ideas by deriving equations step by step, gradatim; correlative to this methodical procedure, the nature of physical reality will be unfolded.
to him step by step, \textit{gradatim}. The goal of this process is a science in
which, as Spinoza—that profound scholar of Descartes’ thought—has it \textit{(Ethics; Part II, Prop. IV)}: “The order and connection of ideas is
that of the order and connection of things.” (Spinoza saw clearly
that the question of grades, degrees, and levels of beings and ideas
was a fundamental one, for, of all things, \textit{Ethics}; that same man also
wrote a work connecting, even in its title, the question of the highest
being, God, and the political order, \textit{i.e.}, his \textit{Theological-Political
Tractate}.)

Descartes is very clear as to his conviction that physical reality
itself is also structured according to ranks or degrees of being. In the
\textit{Responses to the Second Objections} (IX, 105-06), Descartes com-
pares “lower” animals, as effects, with their causes and says: “For,
either it is certain that there is definitely not any more perfection in
the animals which do not have any reason at all—which is the case
also with inanimate bodies—or, if there is any perfection in them, it
is certain that it comes to them from elsewhere and the sun, rain and
earth are definitely not the total causes of these animals.” He then
continues to say that it is irrational to doubt this “on the sole
grounds that one does not have any idea of the cause which concurs
in the generation of a fly, \textit{i.e.}, a cause having as many degrees of
perfection as there are in a fly. . . .” Again, he says (IX, 49) that,
“God has not placed me in the rank \textit{[au rang]} of the most noble and
perfect things,” and hence, that he is not to be supposed to have all
the perfections that exist in the whole universe. Again, (IX, 63), he
says there must be some substance in which the objective reality of
our ideas of corporeal things is contained formally or eminently or,
that such substance may be even “God himself or some other
creature more noble than body in which that very objective reality of
my ideas is contained eminently.” Again, in Axiom VI of his
geometrical proof of God’s existence—and what is a “geometrical”
proof of God’s existence if it does not explicitly reveal the
interdependency of the steps or grades between things—(IX, 128),
Descartes says that “there is more of objective reality in the idea of
substance than in the idea of an accident and more in the idea of
infinite substance than in the idea of finite substance.” And, as a
final instance—one which explicitly joins the concept of rank of
being with his algebraic or analytic considerations—we find him
saying in \textit{Rule VIII} of his early \textit{Regulae} (X, 392, \textit{16-22}): “In effect,
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whatever constitutes a complete degree \([\textit{integrum gradum}]\) in the series by which it is necessary to pass from relative things to absolute things, or inversely, ought necessarily to be examined first before what follows. But, if, as sometimes happens, many things belong to the same level \([\textit{ad eundem gradum pertineant}]\), it is surely always useful to run through them all in order.” Here, Descartes is addressing himself to the methodical analysis of “natural powers” and says, concerning the search for the powers which ultimately cause the specific ratio of incident to refracted angles of light in different media, that

the ratios between the angles of incidence and the angles of refraction depend on the variation of these same angles because of the difference of media; and that variation, in turn, depends on the way in which the ray of light penetrates into all the transparent body; and the knowledge of the property of penetrating into a body presupposes the nature of the action of light to be known also; and, finally, in order to understand the action of light, it is necessary to know generally what a natural power is—and that knowledge is, in that complete series, the last and most absolute term. Thus, when one has seen that clearly by intuition, he should pass by the same degrees \([\textit{per eosdem gradus}]\) . . . and if, in arriving at the second degree \([\textit{in secundo gradu}]\) he does not immediately know the nature of the action of light, he should, following the 7th rule, enumerate all the other natural powers. . . . \(\text{(Ibid., 394, 22-395, 9)}\)

That “second degree” is, \textit{mathematically}, the second power of the equation from which the whole class of so-called “anaclastic” curves of optics is derived analytically.

Taking this together with arguments from section I, it seems fair to conclude that for Descartes the \textit{gradual} method of reaching truth in the sciences faithfully images, intellectually, the ranks and degrees of the reality about which it is concerned. Furthermore, we can conclude that we have a truly sufficient grasp of something through its idea only if we have arrived at that idea \textit{via} a path which has as many distinct steps, grades, or ranks as the thing has degrees of being.\textsuperscript{7} Truth, for Descartes, is a matter of degree.

From this we are also prepared to find that falsity, as well, will be concerned with this question of the relative rank of the being of ideas and of their respective objects. And, indeed, we find (IX, 180) that ideas are materially false only in so far as “I do not recognize that there is more of reality represented to me by one idea than by another.” Thus, for instance, we can consider the idea of cold which
we receive from the senses. Here we really have two distinct ideas—one of heat and another of cold; our ideas are materially false, Descartes says, if we take the ideas of heat and cold and “do not recognize that there is more of reality which would be represented by the one than by the other.” Thus, ideas as such are in themselves true or false, without reference to that of which they are ideas—namely, when we do not recognize in an idea its own proper degree of objective reality. On the other hand, when we consider ideas formally, we consider them as representing something outside, and we then make judgments using these ideas. All error in judgment is, for Descartes, formal error! To see this clearly, we only have to look at Meditatio III, where Descartes says (IX, 29), that there are three forms (formes) of thought: I. ideas proper, which are “as the images of things” (comme les images des choses); II. volitions and affections, e.g., desire, fear, affirmation and denial; and, III. judgment, as when we consider something as the subject of the action of the mind, “thereby adding something to the idea I have of it.”

It cannot be stressed too often both that judgment adds something to our idea of something, and that formal falsity concerns the association of ideas with their objects. On the other hand, volition—free will, choice—is by no means merely a matter of action in this world, according to Descartes. Indeed, one of the lessons taught us by the Meditationes is that the principal power of volition is to permit us to withhold judgment—that is, not to add anything to a present idea with respect to that of which it is an idea. However much a teacher of revolutionaries Descartes may be said to be, he is indeed a philosopher.

In judging, one takes the idea of cold, formally, as representing something; materially, one takes the idea of cold and compares it with the idea of heat in order to determine which idea has more objective reality. If one is materially false and concludes that the idea of cold has as much objective reality as does the idea of heat, then it is likely that he will also commit a formal error in judgment and assent to the proposition that cold is really contained in the ice. This power of asserting/assenting is never misused if and only if we never judge (treat ideas formally) until we are absolutely sure that the degree of objective reality of the idea is exactly that of the degree of entitas, reality, of the thing on which we pass judgment. (It is, of
course, an apparently necessary consequence of this that the inferior, i.e., more ignorant, man, can never pass a true or accurate judgment on a superior or more knowledgeable man. Here we find a very well hidden, technical intimation of what D'Alembert might have meant when he called Descartes a "teacher of revolutionaries"—i.e., that traditional societies with their traditionally chosen legislators and judges must be replaced by analytic physicists or their students. D'Alembert, as we shall see, perhaps does not fully appreciate the place of will, volition, in Descartes' political thought."

In short, we commit error, according to Descartes, when we take an idea and consider it as being caused by something outside us (or, sometimes, even by a particular patron idea inside us) without inquiry as to its respective grade of reality. It is this source of error to which he addresses his method primarily. All entities and all ideas of those entities are so ranked and graded that true science, *Mathesis Universalis*, consists in leading thought by definite, but above all, by *continuous*, degrees—up ranks, grades or steps, *gradatim*—which exactly parallel the structure of hierarchical being within which we humans are placed as thinking beings. It is not too bold to speculate that perhaps out of this view our contemporary fascination with historical processes and stages takes its genesis and that, furthermore, this fascination will endure as long as the generally taught and received physics is analytic: The historical analytic physics of the Enlightenment is the spring which feeds analytic History.

Descartes' doctrine concerning will is essentially concerned with our rank in the hierarchy of beings. He tells us, in *Meditatio IV*, "Concerning the True and the False," (IX, 45-46), that we are distinctly limited in our substantial being but that we have a will which is in no way at all limited. Although at any given time any given understanding is strictly limited as to what in the structured universe it knows, the possessor of that understanding still has the intellectual power to assert opinions concerning anything, even though it be above the 'level' of his understanding—where, it must be remembered, both will and understanding are intellectual facilities. Therefore, one's mental faculty of willing can operate even in cases where his ideas do not have the degree of objective reality required for a clear and distinct grasp of something at hand, that is, before those ideas have a level or degree of objective reality commensurate with that degree possessed by what he is judging. This excess of the
extent of the will over the grasp of the mind is the precondition for the possibility of universal doubt. This alone gives us the power to stand in a certain sort (i.e., analytic) of anticipatory relationship to all things whatsoever, no matter on what level our thoughts may be with respect to their degree of objective reality. Thus, although in fact the mind of any given mortal who will die in a finite length of time may not be capable of grasping some particular truth—because, that is, he will never have the time to build up to it in a finite time from his birth—still, his will is actually ("en effet") capable of choosing to make some judgment concerning that truth, even when it is highest and most beyond the degree or rank of the intellectual reality of his ideas. As a consequence, those things above his present level of understanding are nevertheless in a certain and definite relationship to it—one which has here been termed a relationship of "volitional anticipation"; for, those things cannot be merely unknown, since they are objects of an intellectual power of willing. Descartes calls this tenuous relationship one of indeterminacy on the part of knowledge and says that corresponding to it is the volitional relationship of indifference (IX, 46-48). We are the creatures that we are and therefore we have the power to pass judgments even on what is infinitely more real than the reality of our ideas concerning it. An instance might well be that of the atheist who judges, from the extreme depth of his ignorance, that his idea of God has as its ultimate patron the fiction of some conniver. He is free to pass such a judgment. But, Descartes points out, this freedom which the immensely ignorant atheist has to judge that his notion of God is ultimately merely a fiction of a deceiver is the lowest kind of freedom and is so unreal, relative to that degree of objective reality which the atheist's idea of God could have—e.g., if he were to read and comprehend Descartes' own Meditationes—that it has no effect on his ignorant idea. Hence, the atheist has so little grounds for judging, that either negative or affirmative judgments are equally called for, and he is thus indifferent as to his choice. In this case, and in all such cases, error is based on negation of being (IX, 47-48).

What is a matter of indifference with respect to the will is a matter of indeterminateness with respect to the understanding; for, the bare notion of the higher reality is present, even if that reality does not happen to determine fully the objective reality of the idea. Thus, although the atheist is not fully aware of it, i.e., although he does not
realize it in thought, the idea of God which he truly has is the unique, true patron-idea from which his thinking of God must borrow its degrees of objective reality. Hence, in whatever pit of ignorance one might be, the ultimate patron ideas are present—a fundamental theme in Descartes and the necessary precondition for his analytical mathematics as he himself understood it—and, as a consequence, whatever stands between one’s present ignorance and the full intellectual realization of those patron ideas as patron is, as it were, known indeterminately in the bare consciousness of the subject-matter.

Likewise, to return to mathematics, the quaesitum or sought-for solution to a problem, is, in some very determinate and definite sense of the term, “anticipated,” or, even, “indeterminately given through anticipation.” Things whose reality are of a higher degree than the present grade of objective reality of our present ideas about them are, so to speak, foreshadowed or adumbrated as “to-be-known” in the very excess of the extension of the will to know over our actual understanding, and, therefore, the principal source of error, according to Descartes, is also the very grounds for anticipating a replacement of error with knowledge. (This is the heart of Meditatio VI.) Once again, volition is a power of mind, for Descartes—no less than is ratiocination itself. Choice is an intellectual act, essentially, and that very infinitude of the extent of the will is a sign of the extent to which man can expect other powers of intellect to extend. In calling volition or choice—where choice is not desire for Descartes—an intellectual power, Descartes thereby identifies anything which can be chosen at any time (in or out of understanding), under any circumstance (drunk, sober, ill), as a definitely potential object of understanding. Therefore, as an actual object of volition, everything in the universe is a sort of actual subject of intellect. We are thus permitted to say that, for Descartes, the very fact of willing anything whatever implies that there is some degree of something akin to objective reality present—even in the most wild or disordered of ideas. And it is volition which supplies a sort of pro tem replacement for objective reality to ideas of things which are not as yet grasped clearly and distinctly. Indeed, we see Descartes say (IX, 46) that once he has grasped entirely clearly and distinctly some idea, he is not at all indifferent to it—and hence it is no longer subject to volition, but rather to desire and repugnance which are
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contingent on true understanding (or else, upon the teaching of our complex nature).

We can sum this up in the following analogy: As volition is to desire and repugnance, so is merely being aware of existence to the grasping or conceiving of an idea whose objective reality is of the same rank of being as the thing itself has of degrees of entity or reality. A psychic—and thus mental—power, volition, supplies ("eminently") to our deficient ideas of what is truly existent but not sufficiently known the defect in objective reality of our ideas which can only be made up, en effet, through the analytical procedure—i.e., through assuming the sought-for, quaesitum, as given and known, and then deducing (gradatim) from this supposition the consequences until we arrive at something truly given or truly known—vide La Géométrie, VI, 372, 10-24.

We close this development with a reflection on the relation of will and popular wisdom.

The citizen who is a non-scientist must ignorantly adhere to the laws and customs of his country by an act of free will. For, no non-scientist could possibly have the perfect understanding required to fix his choices to the absolutely best choice possible. Under Descartes’ analysis of volition, knowledge, and indifference, any adherence to a civil order out of which lawfulness itself could grow would be based either on an act of positive choice—and this, at first sight, could only apply to the citizen-scientist who clearly understands his own good—or an act of will fixed through some negative means such as ‘scientistic’ propaganda which works through such devices as constructing attacks on the pre-scientific culture, by positively promising ‘better things for better living through chemistry’ and the like, or, by redefining all political problems as precisely those human problems which can be solved by technological progress. If, to continue with this latter case, such devices in fact were to succeed in fixing the will of the non-scientist citizen, then his willing adherence to the legislation of the scientist-ministers would seem to comprise a sort of volitional substitute for scientifically based adherence to those very laws. In this case, however, the “eminent reality” of the volitions of the relatively ignorant populace would be only that borrowed, in turn, from the “objective artifice” of the minds of the scientist-ministers. Whereas, to the contrary, what is sought is a civil order in which the eminent reality of the
volitions of the relatively ignorant populace lend to their relatively obscure grasp of public matters a reality which—although not the objective reality of the clear and distinct ideas of the scientists—would make up for that defect because the exalted degree of reality of the substance, res cogitans, wills the good of the union of mind and body within the safety and comfort of civil society; this eminence of degree would suffice to make up that defect of objective reality in their relatively low level of understanding. The eminent reality of the free will of the populace should manifest itself in its power to give to the state in which they live a degree of objective perfection just commensurate with the degree of objective reality of the ideas each citizen has of his or her own healthy union of body and soul. For, then, and only then, would the art of politics become materially identical with the art of medicine—Descartes’ dessin.

But, if volitional indifference answers to intellectual indeterminateness, how could volition be freely exercised by a relatively ignorant populace? Would not their ignorance necessarily render them indifferent, and hence incapable of exercising their free wills?

In Meditatio IV, Descartes tells us that the infinite plenitude of volition answers to the actually infinite plenitude of being of the universe as perfectly known by God Himself. He says that it is precisely in our possession of an infinitely extensive will that we are most God-like (VII, 56, 26 - 57, 15). Since volition is an intellectual power, the “eminent reality” supplied by the mind to our particular intellectual acts of will must therefore contain our only basis for judgment and hence for particular choices subsequent on particular desires. This requires, however, that the “eminent reality” borrowed from the substance, res cogitans, by volition anticipates a distinct degree of reality—precisely that degree possessed by the object being considered as choiceworthy or not. In precisely the same way, the structure of the general equations of physics expresses indeterminately the grade or level of reality of whatever it is to which they can apply in their full generality—where that generality is a sort of anticipation of all individual cases which can fall under the general one. Free will, like Mathesis Universalis, (algebra), is only called for or needed where there is something definitely unknown, i.e., known definitely in the indeterminate manner and hence by anticipation. But, again like Mathesis Universalis, the degree of objective reality which must be present in any given instance of thought (including
volition), in order to be precisely commensurate with the degree of entity with which it is concerned, must be present to it formally: In mathematics, the very order of its symbolic expression makes explicit the interdependency of the partial expressions it contains for the givens and the unknowns; by analogy, the will of the relatively ignorant populace can be freely expressed only in that state whose freely chosen form of government is one which is entirely open to the constant inspection and re-affirmation of that populace. The relatively ignorant populace can freely exercise its will in that form of government which is defined by its structures, where politics is a profession, but above all else, where the goal of civil union is explicitly understood by each and every citizen and minister as being the continuation of the union of body and soul, of life, of each citizen/elector.

1. Vide: Fenn's Algebra (Dublin, c. 1750): "... in general, the Solution of Problems consists of two Parts, in the first the Analyst expresses by a letter as $x$ or $y$ etc., the unknown Quantity sought, or one of those which when known, serves to determine the rest. . . .

"The first of those two Parts is not easily reduced to precepts intelligible to Beginners, and perhaps can be learned only by Example." (p. 5). This author, who taught algebra for five years, heartily concurs with Mr. Fenn.

2. It seems not unlikely to this author that Descartes, as well as Vieta, was possibly influenced (directly or indirectly) by a text of pre-Galilean music theory, the Sectio Canonis, Vide: I. Heilberg and H. Menge, eds., Euclidis Opera Omnia, Vol. VIII, “Phaenomena et Scripta Musica” (Leipsig: Teubner, 1916), esp. pp. 169-73, Props. VIII-XII; also, Vide: Descartes' own Compendium Musicae (X 89-141), whose treatment appears to be that of Euclid and certainly not that of Galileo.

3. The term engineer is only a variant spelling of the Latin term ingenioso plus the ending required to make that adjective into a noun referring to one who has ingenium.

4. It very likely did not escape Descartes' notice (nor should it ours) that machine in Greek (Μηκανική) is translated by ingenium in Latin.

5. This is Bertrand Russell's definition of a natural number. The definitions of Peano's Postulates follow the same rationale. Descartes' influence is very great.

6. Vide: Definition IV of Descartes' proof of the existence of God in Res, Sec. Obj., especially in the French version which has important changes from the Latin version (French, IX, 125; Latin, VII, 161, 10-13): "The same things are said to be eminently in the objects of ideas when they are not truly such in them as in the ideas, but when they are so great (si grandes) that they can make up for that defect by their excellence."

Gilson (E. Gilson, Etudes sur le Rôle de la Pensée Médiévale dans la
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Formation du Système Cartesien (Paris: Libraire J. Vrin, 1967) hardly touches upon this question of the eminent reality of ideas in Descartes' thoughts. When he does, however, it is in the context of discussing causality (passim). The heart of the problem with this term, as well as with the term "objective reality of an idea," lies with intelligibility and, in so far as causality enters the picture, it is as the cause of knowledge. For Descartes, to be sure, to think is to make. But any making is for him posterior to a thinking.


8. This is truly odd, since "judgment," however else it is used, constantly refers primarily to our sense of what is more important than something else. But such a meaning—the usual one—does not fall in Descartes where we might expect. Rather, that meaning falls under what Descartes calls the question of material falsity and not under that of formal truth and falsity which (according to him) concerns judgment.

Our contemporary low estimation of 'value judgments' is not unlikely to have its origin in this Cartesian reversal, which replaces the question of value (for Descartes a material question) with that of the objectiveness of a state of mind (for Descartes, a formal, "judgmental," question). If so, this reversal of definitions is not without its momentous—not to say awful—consequences.

9. That is to say, since for Descartes les pensées (including perceptions, volitions, etc.) have a distinct mode of being as pensées, any given one has an objective reality which is present to it materially. If any pensée, however, is then considered as a pensée of something which is not a pensée (such as a tree outside), we consider it, formally, as being commensurate, or not, with that of which it is the (presumptive) pensée. Hence the formulae of mathematics can be viewed (a) as mathematically correct deductions from other formulae, and thus, "materially"; (b) as means to a solution of a problem in physics, and thus "formally." Any investigation of volition in a context including choiceworthy and repugnant objects would be a formal undertaking and, in Descartes' case, is identical with La Morale—Ethics, or perhaps more accurately, Social Science.
At the close of his masterful study of the roots of American politics, Gordon Wood says of the Federalist achievement that it shattered "the conceptions of political theory that had imprisoned men's minds for centuries and brilliantly reconstructed the framework for a new republican liberty a reconstruction that radically changed the future discussion of politics."¹ The Federalist accomplishment, according to Wood, marked a watershed in Western history, inaugurating what he alternately calls a "kinetic theory of politics" or a "romantic view of politics." Whereas seventeenth-century contractarianism repudiated the idea of an organic hierarchy embracing rulers and people, thereby breaking the community into antagonistic interests, the Federalist political solution further dissolved a unified people into a mass of competing individuals. Erecting a republic on egoism, the Founders intended to rely on self-interested feeling rather than on republican public spiritedness, and they sought to guarantee freedom by means of the immediate interest of each autonomous individual.

Thus, the Federalist science of politics consisted in giving institutional form to the psychologization of politics begun by Hobbes, a process wherein appetite and desire displaced reason as the norm for man.² The Federalist transposition of political order to the appetitive and passionate level was remarked by Arthur O. Lovejoy: "Their problem was not chiefly one of political ethics but of political psychology, a need not so much to preach to Americans about what they ought to do, as to predict successfully what they would do, supposing certain governmental mechanisms were (or were not) established."³ Lovejoy noted that the effect of the Federalist "method of counterpoise" was to preserve the status quo. Others too have recognized the durability of the regime established by the Federalist "science of politics,"⁴ but adequate attention has not been given to the consequences of that overarching system of stability. Paradoxically, the preservative force of the Federalist formula for republican liberty entails the alienation of men in liberal-democratic society. It is necessary, however, to say a word
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about the concept of alienation before attempting to draw out some of the implications of this “new science of politics,” as Hamilton called it.

The term “alienation” in this discussion does not bear a Hegelian or Marxist meaning. Why this is not the case may become apparent from the development of the discussion, but for the present suffice it to say that I mean something different by the term. By alienation I mean two things: first, a psychological condition when the rational and social nature of man is vitiated; second, a political condition resulting from the separation of man from his fellows. In part I shall try to indicate how these two dimensions of alienation, the personal and social, are inseparably linked. Long ago Plato perceived that the polis was man writ large, that there was a cycle of society and character in which society mirrored the order or disorder of its members’ souls. Although James Madison participated in the eighteenth-century revolt against the classical political tradition, he implied a somewhat similar recognition when he asked rhetorically, “But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?” What I am suggesting is that the alienation endemic to liberal-democratic society, the estrangement of men from themselves and from their fellows, is predicated by the premises of our political tradition. Let us, then, turn to the American science of politics and examine the order of politics proposed by The Federalist.

The paramount problem of republican government addressed by Madison in Number 10 was the problem of faction—how to control the violence of faction within the framework of popular government. The object was to find some artificial, mechanical means of balancing competing, antagonistic interests so that neither a minority nor majority could tyrannize the rest of society. Madison took the division of society into adverse interests to be inevitable in a free society: the pride and selfishness of men wholly corrupted their reason; hence, as long as liberty exists, men’s egoism will attach their “passions” and “interests” to their fallible “opinions.” Since he did not want to abolish the cause of faction, namely liberty, the only acceptable solution was to control its effects, to mitigate the ferocity of the struggle between men. Most crucially, the unequal faculties and talents of men gave rise to unequal possessions of property; any common interest between men, therefore, was impossible. Con-
severest controversies even "the cause the government, [Madison wrote], is to protect those "different degrees and kinds of property" resulting from men's natural inequality. Some years previously in his "North American" essays for The Pennsylvania Journal Madison made explicit the Mandevillean equation of private vice with public good contained in the Federalist formula for republican liberty. Implying the identity of the good and the useful, Madison declared that

the same active and predominant passion of the human breast, which prompts mankind to arrogate superiority and to the acquirement of riches, honor and power, which restricted to the selfish purposes of an individual we term ambition, is when extended to the disinterested object of aggrandizing a community, what we dignify with the appellation of patriotism—(that) the exertion of this principle being as advantageous to a republic, as it is useful to a man....

It is not merely the case that a private vice may incidentally accrue in some way to the public benefit; rather, the public good in itself is seen as derivative of individual pride and avidity. In fact, the condition on which the Madisonian scheme in Number 10 is based—the irreconcilable division of society into hostile interests and parties—is the very condition which must be perpetuated, in fact intensified, for the solution.

If the nature of man inevitably bred faction, Madison did not think that human conflict revolved around the sole issue of property. In the first place, he did not mean by property simply material goods and wealth, for in "its larger and juster meaning, it embraces everything to which a man may attach a value and have a right, and which leaves to everyone else the like advantage." Thus, property includes not only land, goods, and money, but a man's opinions, the safety and liberty of his person, and the exercise of his faculties. It is the object of government to protect both kinds of property, especially a man's property in his conscience which is "the most sacred of all property" because it is a natural right, while other rights depend partially upon positive law. The sources of human contention are as varied as life: men's "opinions" on religion and government, the attraction and aversion to different personalities, even "the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions" where no real cause exists. Indeed, Hamilton claimed at one point that the severest controversies often arose over personal pique: "There is
nothing so apt to agitate the passions of mankind as personal considerations, whether they relate to ourselves or to others, who are to be the objects of our choice or preference.” 11 Moreover, among property holders serious conflict frequently arises between different kinds of property, for example, between agricultural and commercial interests. Nevertheless, Madison acknowledged, “the most common and durable source of factions” has been the unequal distribution of property, the conflict of haves versus have-nots.12 The chief concern of The Federalist was to protect the minority of property holders against the majority of propertyless men. A continued rule of good and wise men, Madison feared, was not to be expected, and “we all know that neither moral nor religious motives can be relied on as an adequate control.”13 Therefore, some secular, institutional solution was necessary to control the effects of faction, to promote a restrained and enlightened pursuit of appetite, to avoid physical violence, and to protect personal security and the rights of property.

A majority faction must either be prevented from forming, or if it does come to exist, it must be made unable to act in concert. For this reason Madison followed David Hume and advocated, contrary to Montesquieu and others before him, the superiority of a large republic over a small one. Extending the sphere of republican government meant that it would be difficult for men to form or to act upon a shared interest. Madison delineated the solution of Federalist Number 10 in “Vices of the Political System of the United States,” notes composed in 1787 before he went to Philadelphia: “The Society becomes broken into a greater variety of interests, of pursuits of passions, which check each other, whilst those who may feel a common sentiment have less opportunity of communication and concert.”14 If the object of politics is to secure individual autonomy by playing one competing interest against another, this purpose will be enhanced by expanding and multiplying the manifold passions and appetites of men. “Extend the sphere,” Publius wrote, and you will produce “a greater variety of parties and interests;” you will lessen the chances for a common interest to form; even if men do feel a “common motive,” it will be difficult for them to act; and, of course, greater numbers of people will increase the isolation and distrust between them.15 In this fashion the Federalist plan for republican liberty fosters the atomization and alienation of men in society. Nor did Madison fail to perceive a parallel between civil
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liberty and religious freedom. Religious disestablishment and the proliferation of sects rendered them innocuous and neutralized any tangible effect religion might have on society. Secularism and liberal democracy go hand in hand, but we must return to this point later.

In Federalist Number 51 Madison reverted to the same formula of fragmentation and atomization, as he sought an expedient to secure the separation of powers in the new government. Again the solution lay in the guarantee he previously offered for republican liberty generally—a balance of power between competing, private interests. This countervailing balance of individual egoism he called the "invention(s) of prudence."16 We must explore further the relation between reason and the appetites and desires in Federalist theory, but for the moment we should note Madison’s understanding of prudence. He does not conceive of prudence as the deliberate habit of choosing the due means to a good end, but rather as an external constraint whereby the emancipated passions of individuals may be gratified short of mutual annihilation. The whole system of the separation of powers within government and the federal division of authority between the national and state governments was to be achieved by relying on the ambition and envy of men. “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition,” Madison proclaimed. “The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.”17 As Hamilton explained in arguing for the re-eligibility of the President, “the best security for the fidelity of mankind is to make their interest coincide with their duty.”18 The structure of government, Madison explained, must be so contrived that one part will impose an external constraint upon another. Similarly, in describing the structure and powers of the presidency Hamilton based the success of the institution upon the triumph of certain passions over others within an intrinsically disordered condition:

His avarice might be a guard upon his avarice. Add to this that the same man might be vain or ambitious, as well as avaricious. And if he could expect to prolong his honors by his good conduct, he might hesitate to sacrifice his appetite for them to his appetite for gain. But with the prospect before him of approaching and inevitable annihilation, his avarice would be likely to get the victory over his caution, his vanity, or his ambition.19

It is not my intention to deny the due merit of a separation of
powers and of the principle of federalism. Today, as before, Madison is well taken when he says, "you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." Yet perhaps we have come of sufficient historical age so that the deficiencies of the Enlightenment's mechanistic approach to politics can be recognized. Although the classical political teaching held that one cannot expect to have a good society composed of bad men, liberal-democratic theory posits that good government is built precisely upon a foundation of moral and social disharmony. The Federalist erected a scheme for more than a governmental structure, and we must appreciate this in order fully to understand the American political tradition. The Federalist attempted to institutionalize a systematic and sustained liberation of appetite and passion, a liberation more effectually achieved the more stable the external order of the regime becomes. The stability of the regime, moreover, varies directly with the instability and disorder of the individuals and groups comprising it.

The liberal state which emerged in the eighteenth century was fashioned after the image of the free economic marketplace which in turn was modeled upon the autonomous individual defined by his passions and appetites. A leitmotif of The Federalist is the impotence of reason in the face of irresistible passions and appetites. Publius regards reason as a calculative capacity for the effective satisfaction of desire and appetite. Even as instrument or servant, however, reason fails, for the frailty of reason leads it to succumb to the immediate and unrestrained rush of passion and appetite. A deliberate, measured gratification of passion and appetite ought to guide government, but men's reason cannot provide even the utilitarian calculus. Men will inevitably divide and fall out in the attempt to exercise reason; therefore, they must be ruled by a common passion. In a condition of disordered existence community will be possible only on the lowest, or passionate and appetitive, level. To the extent, however, that men must be ruled according to the measure of the lowest level, community is further attenuated.

"This policy," Madison wrote, "of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives," permeated the whole of human life, "private as well as public." Madison portrays an image of society in which individual autonomy and assertion pervade all relations from the marketplace to the family. Alexis de Tocqueville
pointed out the atomizing tendency of bourgeois society. In *Democracy in America* Tocqueville explained how egoism furnished the ground of the moral and political order of America.\(^2\)\(^3\) Furthermore, the increasing private chaos fostered by democratic society was far from incompatible with public order and a certain regularity of morality. Private aggrandizement needs public order for its satisfaction, and a particular species of morality is conducive to public tranquillity and industry. Some pleasures will receive social disapprobation, but those allowed by democratic society will tend to absorb men and create a sort of "virtuous materialism" which in the end "would not corrupt, but enervate, the soul and noiselessly unbend its springs of action."\(^2\)\(^4\) Tocqueville revealed the connection between liberal democracy and capitalism along with its effect: the total politicization and commercialization of life.\(^2\)\(^5\) All human ties and relations, all traditional institutions and intermediate powers would be swept away by the principles of self-interest and popular sovereignty. *The Federalist* expressly aimed to comprehend "in the society so many separate descriptions of citizens as will render an unjust combination of a majority of the whole very improbable, if not impracticable," to break society itself "into so many parts, interests and classes of citizens."\(^2\)\(^6\) Tocqueville believed democracy inexorably released desires it could never satisfy: the result would be ceaseless upheaval and fragmentation, together with constant, galling dissatisfaction.\(^2\)\(^7\)

Initially, it might seem that such a fragmented, atomized society would be so unstable it would come apart at the seams. This disintegration does not occur because liberal democracy grounds public order upon private chaos. Before turning to certain other architects of bourgeois society in order to elucidate the problem, let us recall one of the principal aims of the newly proposed government. Unlike the government under the Articles of Confederation, the new regime ordained by the Constitution would act directly upon individual citizens rather than indirectly through the states representing citizens in their corporate capacity.\(^2\)\(^8\) Hamilton enunciated the Federalist intent, when he argued that the Confederation, by being unable to legislate for individuals, had created a condition of anarchy. In political associations of subordinate, independent sovereignties "there will be a perpetual effort in each to fly off from the common center."\(^2\)\(^9\) The order and stability of the regime will be secured, then,
insofar as it can intimately and forcefully attach itself to the persons of citizens in their individual status. The authors of The Federalist, of course, were referring to the issue of state sovereignty, but the dynamics of the formula for republican liberty tend to enervate other subsidiary groups and intermediate powers in society. The national authority, Hamilton explained, “must be able to address itself immediately to the hopes and fears of individuals; and to attract to its support those passions which have the strongest influence upon the human heart.”

In the new era of the psychologization of politics the more national authority tangibly affects the lives of individuals, “the further it enters into those objects which touch the most sensible chords and put in motion the most active springs of the human heart, the greater will be the probability that it will conciliate the respect and attachment of the community.” Since man is a creature of passion and appetite, the key to political success will be to “interest the sensations of the people,” to touch “matters of internal concern,” to operate “through those channels and currents in which the passions of mankind naturally flow.” Nor, in the gratification and control of emancipated individuals, should rulers be unmindful that “obedience to a government will commonly be proportioned to the goodness or badness of its administration” and that the accumulated power and resources of a single authority will have an irresistible impact on “public opinion.”

To understand the Federalist formula for republican liberty one must refer to the writings of certain English thinkers who influenced the Founding Fathers, particularly Thomas Hobbes and James Harrington. Hobbes revolutionized Western political thought by devising a means of restraining the mob of liberated, passionate individuals. The ordering principle of Hobbes’s entire work is fear of the greatest evil, death. That “mortal god,” Leviathan, imposed an artificial, external control upon the instincts of autonomous, appetitive individuals. Beyond securing self-preservation through terror, Hobbes’s artificial state would preserve order by promoting material gratification, what he called “commodious living.”

For Madison physical survival and happiness, arising out of the instinct for self-preservation, are the ends of political association. Universal anxiety and the desire to obviate death admit two solutions: erecting “a will in the community independent of the
majority” as in a monarchical regime, or, more securely, establishing an extended, federal republic. Just as in the state of nature where the weak are at the mercy of the stronger and “even the stronger individuals are prompted, by the uncertainty of their condition, to submit to a government which may protect the weak as well as themselves,” so too in civil society precarious majorities will “be gradually induced, by a like motive, to wish for a government which will protect all parties, the weaker as well as the more powerful.” Madison offered the extended, federal republic as the instrument for obtaining physical survival and material comfort. Throughout, Publius directs his argument to the passions and appetites of his readers: the new national government will best provide physical security and commercial prosperity.

This plan of The Federalist followed the teaching of David Hume who insisted rulers must take men as they are and govern them according to their passions and interests. A commercial society fostered the power and stability of a state not only because it produced a profusion of goods, but because it instilled “a spirit of avarice and industry” in men and tended to “gratify the senses and appetites.” A commercial society, Hume admitted, unleashed insatiable desires; yet the more or less equal gratification of appetites would bind the interests of egoistic individuals to the state.

“The science of politics,” wrote Hamilton, “like most other sciences, has received great improvement.” His survey of history led Hamilton to see it as unrelieved, dismal failure characterized by recurring political instability and decline. This legacy resulted from the fact that “the ancients” ill understood certain principles for perfecting popular government, principles such as the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances. Particularly critical for political stability and durability was the principle of enlarging the orbit on which government operated. As the Federalist formula suggested, however, the key to political success lay not only in enlarging the geographical orbit of government, but in expanding the ambit of human possibility and altering the level of the relationship between government and citizens.

A century before the new American science of politics was constructed, the English political writer James Harrington outlined the direction of the Federalist formula for republican liberty.
Harrington described an imaginary society, *Oceana*, as “a commonwealth for increase,” a society built “upon the mightiest foundation that any has been laid from the beginning of the world to this day.”41 That foundation was equality of opportunity. The authors of *The Federalist* were struck, as Harrington and Hobbes and others were at the dawn of the modern era, with the decline and failure of all former governments. Harrington contended that the stability and permanence of government rested in uniting the material interest of each individual citizen to it. An equalitarian, competitive society, he predicted, would create such a distribution of political power that no individual or group would have the inclination or capacity to disturb it: “the perfection of government lies upon such a libration in the frame of it, that no man or men in or under it can have the interest, or having the interest, can have the power to disturb it with sedition.”42 Only an “equal commonwealth,” Harrington maintained, contains this “full perfection.”43

Hamilton viewed men as so animated by blind passion that neighbors make natural enemies, unless their common weakness can force them into a dependence upon each other.44 The evil indicated the cure for Hamilton. The durability of government could be secured by attaching a multitude of private interests to it, and the centrifugal tendencies of an atomized society could be checked by making men’s gratification dependent upon the stability of the whole. For this enterprise a moral and social order were irrelevant. Already Harrington had declared the ancient belief good men are necessary to create good laws to be demagoguery: “But ‘give us good orders, and they will make us good men,’ is the maxim of a legislator, and the most infallible in politics.”45

Harrington’s design of the everlasting, bourgeois commonwealth coincides with the Federalist plan at a number of points, including the factor of mobility and perpetual change. He discerned the need for constant and rapid movement in order to preserve the equality which is the cement of society. A process of ceaseless deracination formed a prerequisite of external order, for “in motion consists life, and the motion of a commonwealth will never be current unless it be circular.”46 The commonwealth, he warned, “if it be not in rotation both as to persons and things, it will be very sick.”47 Anticipating the Federalist solution of social atomization and the multiplication of factions, Harrington wrote:
So that if you allow not a commonwealth her rotation, in which consists her equality, you reduce her to a party, and then it is necessary that you be physicians indeed, or rather farriers; for you will have strong patients, and such as must be haltered and cast, or yourselves may need bonesetters.48

Harrington argued, before the eighteenth century discovered the “invisible hand,” that the common interest of society (a conception which by the seventeenth century replaced the common good of society) derived from the preponderant weight of private interests. “Whereas the people, taken apart,” he said, “are but so many private interests; but if you take them together, they are the public interest.”49 This public interest, the sum of individual appetites, Harrington called “right reason,”50 a concept similar to what Hamilton meant by the “general or remote considerations of policy, utility, or justice” in contrast to men’s “momentary passions” and “immediate interests.”51 The bourgeois commonwealth Harrington compared to a human organism where the arteries of the heart “by a perpetual circulation” suck in and spout out “the vital blood.”52 This type of government would be more durable than life itself because, like the earth, generations may pass, but it will remain forever. With the proper “architecture” such a commonwealth might never dissolve, at least from internal causes, and if an appetitive balance is maintained, “you must bring the world in such a case to your balance.”53 Set on this foundation, “the empire of the world”54 shall not escape the grasp of the everlasting commonwealth.

The idea of a secular society, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century solution for political order, constitutes a significant element of Federalist theory. From his vantage point in the early nineteenth century Tocqueville believed his predecessors had been wrong:

The philosophers of the eighteenth century explained in a very simple manner the gradual decay of religious faith. Religious zeal, said they, must necessarily fail the more generally liberty is established and knowledge diffused. Unfortunately, the facts by no means accord with their theory.55

It may be questioned whether on the terms of his own analysis Tocqueville was warranted in drawing this conclusion, but for our present purposes let us simply take account of his predecessors’ intention. Indebted especially to David Hume for his political
philosophy, Madison took from Hume the formula of separation and
division in society.56 Hume believed that formula would guarantee
both civil and religious liberty by multiplying, and hence neutral-
izing, rival factions. Secular society was the counterpart of liberal
society; the formulas for civil and religious liberty were identical. As
Madison expressed it, "It consists in the one case in the multiplicity
of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects."57 Both
would be enhanced, he held, by promoting a maximum of variety,
mobility, expansion, and movement: "The degree of security in both
cases will depend on the number of interests and sects; and this may
be presumed to depend on the extent of country and number of
people comprehended under the same government."58

The men of the Enlightenment did not have in mind merely
religious freedom and toleration. In a sense Tocqueville was correct;
"religious zeal" had not abated when he visited America, but
"enthusiasm," as Hume called it, was compatible with a secular
society, that is, a society in which religion was a private, other-
worldly affair divorced from all dimensions of social and political
existence. In an essay entitled "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,"
Hume proposed to treat what he termed "two species of false
religion" which threatened civil society. Superstition gave rise, he
argued, to "priestly religion," that is, organized, institutional,
ecclesiastical religion such as Anglicanism or, more perilously,
Catholicism. Enthusiastic religions like the radical Protestant sects
were more furious, were noisier, at first, but Hume saw that they
eventually atrophy. "Priestly religion" endangered civil society
because it could make an impact on it. On the other hand, when the
first passion of enthusiasts is spent, "men naturally, in all fanatical
sects, sink into the greatest remissness and coolness in sacred
matters."59 "Priestly religion," in contrast, can exercise an influence
upon society; hence, concluded Hume, "superstition is an enemy to
civil liberty, and enthusiasm a friend to it."60 Add to this the fact,
he continued, that enthusiasts are typically free-thinkers with no
theological formation, and secularists should recognize they have
nothing to fear. Before long these enthusiasts will become indistin-
guishable from them; they will become latitudinarians and deists. For
Hobbes also secularism provided the final solution to the political
problem of stability. The rational state of the modern era cannot
allow the fear of God to overcome the fear of death, the desire for
security. To do so would weaken the very foundation of political order. The fear of God must be eliminated, a task achieved by the disenchantment of the world, by rationalized religion, by popular enlightenment.61

The disenchantment of the world and the rationalization of religion will be furthered, if religion is reduced to a matter of private opinion and its value is measured by its success in the marketplace. In his 1785 Memorial and Remonstrance to the Virginia legislature in support of Jefferson’s Bill for Religious Liberty, Madison offered a defense of religious freedom which prefigured the secularist intent of the Constitution and The Federalist. He held religion a matter of individual reason and private conscience “because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men.”62 A matter of private opinion, religion is an affair between the individual and the Deity; civil society is totally autonomous, and “Religion is wholly exempt from its cognizance.”63 Each individual’s religious faith comprises one competing interest among many. Those who make claims for an established church are afraid to put the merits of religion up to the free marketplace of competition. Finally, Madison argued, experience shows that establishment destroys the moderation of sects along with public order and prosperity.

Among their purposes, the authors of The Federalist delineated the kind of political order necessary to establish a powerful commercial nation. The pattern of alienation contained in the Federalist formula for republican liberty derives from commercial society; thus, we must seek the roots of the psychologization of politics in the nature of commercial society. It may be instructive, then, to turn our attention to the man who above all others in his age fashioned the political economy of the wealth of nations, Adam Smith. Smith’s reflections on the effects of commercial society and on religion and education arise from the problem of political order in a society of liberated passions and appetites.

Prior to Smith it had been observed that commercial society was marked initially by a moderate but pervasive and incessant desire for gain which, when gratified, in time created a larger appetite. “Thus,” Montesquieu wrote, “he who has gratified his desire of gaining a little raises himself to a situation in which he is not less desirous of gaining a great deal.”64 With the emancipation of economic activity in free
republics commerce became everywhere mixed with public affairs. Once unleashed, the passions and appetites would lack all restraint, Montesquieu perceived, for the dynamics of capitalism promoted limitless acquisition. In the absence of an intelligible order and any directive principle, more is better: "It is difficult for a country to avoid having superfluities; but it is the nature of commerce to render the superfluous useful, and the useful necessary. The state will be, therefore, able to afford necessities to a much greater number of subjects." An architect of modern political economy, Smith endeavored to make normative the appetitive and passionate elements in human nature, thereby psychologizing morality and politics. Reducing the ethical question to a problem of functionality, Smith viewed man as a set of psychological reactions and construed the dysfunctional as immoral. In his Lectures on Justice and again later in The Wealth of Nations Smith explained how self-interest forms the ordering principle of all human action and how commercial society exacerbates this element of human nature. Since commercial society is directed toward either immediate consumption or the increase of fixed or circulating capital, that man is "crazy" who seeks neither present pleasure for future profit: "A man must be perfectly crazy who, when there is tolerable security, does not employ all the stock which he commands, whether it be his own or borrowed of other people, in some one or other of those three ways."  

Smith maintained that commercial society produced much good and fostered certain desirable human qualities such as probity and punctuality. But, he conceded, there were "some inconveniences" to it, namely, the stupification and debasement of the mass of laboring people. The division of labor confined men's attention to a few, routine tasks so that "in every commercial nation the low people are exceedingly stupid:" their concern was restricted to immediate, material benefits; education was neglected and the family weakened; the moral and social senses were sapped, and gradually men grew effeminate by "having their minds constantly employed on the arts of luxury." In short, said Smith, "His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues."  

Since the vast majority of people in what Smith called "civilized society" would be brutalized and alienated, he proposed that government support "those most essential parts of education," that is, "to read, write, and account." Accordingly, in Smith we find an
early proposal for mass public education, education conceived as the acquisition of skills and vocational certification. The acquisition of these utilitarian skills could be encouraged, he suggested, by awarding “little badges of distinction to the children of the common people who excel in them.” The most importantly, mass public education would be politically advantageous because it would make the masses more enlightened and, therewith, more docile and tractable. “The state, however,” Smith emphasized, “derives no inconsiderable advantage from their instruction. The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders.”

In later years Madison similarly stated the case for public education. Popular government made public education indispensable because self-government requires knowledge, and knowledge is power. There should be a common class interest in public education, for aside from its many, incontestable, utilitarian benefits, public education contributed to social order and cohesion. Public education would provide “the best security against crafty & dangerous encroachments on the public liberty;” the study of geography and history, particularly, would enlighten the masses and break down “local prejudices;” finally, “the leisure of the labouring classes” would be occupied.

Within the overarching problem of political order the question of religion and morality is inseparable from that of education. For Smith, as for Hume, secularism and sectarianism were inseparable; religious factionalism was the correlative of political factionalism. Smith’s formula for political and religious liberty followed exactly the plan adopted by The Federalist: numerous, conflicting groups and sects would atomize the people, neutralize each other, and render negligible the cumulative effect of religion on society. In the end, he hoped, religious liberty and sectarianism would lead to a “rational religion,” for the concessions which they would mutually find it both convenient and agreeable to make to one another might in time probably reduce the doctrine of
the greater part of them to that pure and rational religion, free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism, such as wise men have in all ages of the world wished to see established.\textsuperscript{75}

Like Hume and the authors of The Federalist, Smith thought people, above all common people, committed to moral or religious principles were deleterious to political order. Seeking a way to “correct whatever was unsocial or disagreeably rigorous in the morals of all the little sects into which the country was divided,”\textsuperscript{76} Smith turned to the final solution for political order in liberal, secular society. An unsociable, disagreeable morality in the masses could be eliminated in two ways: first, through popular enlightenment, that is, through the popularized study of philosophy and science, “the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition;”\textsuperscript{77} second, through a measured hedonism and skepticism induced by various public diversions and amusements. Austere, intractable beliefs and practices among the common people could be debunked and ridiculed by public entertainments. In this manner order is restored among the mob of emancipated individuals by rooting it in their constant gratification. The progressive enlightenment of déracinés becomes an exercise in the manipulation of public opinion. Smith noted in passing that such popular enlightenment would be supplied by academic competition between members of the middle class which would furnish plenty of safe teachers.

Less than a half century after the new American science of politics had taken form Alexis de Tocqueville discerned the paradoxical nature of liberal-democratic society. Having dissolved the traditional bonds of community, democratic society casts men in lonely isolation from one another. Democracy severs the organic links of society, cuts every man off from his ancestors, descendants, and contemporaries, and “throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.”\textsuperscript{78} The men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries intended to found a new science of politics on “good orders” alone, as Harrington put it, and to derive public benefit from the release of private vice. The Federalist formula for republican liberty was based upon the atomization of society and relentless pursuit of self-interest. Tocqueville perceived how democratic individualism at last enervated the whole of human life, and he grasped the paradox of the successful gratification of men’s appetites and
desires. A measure of gratification merely stimulated misery, anxiety, and the pursuit of new pleasures. The American "clutches everything, he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications." Life becomes a duration of unrelieved restlessness, apprehension, regret, and envy in an elusive quest to satisfy the appetites and desires. Although the new science of politics promised eternal life for the public body and material prosperity for its members, "Death at length overtakes him, but it is before he is weary of his bootless chase of that complete felicity which forever escapes him." 

The juxtaposition of political order alongside personal and social disorder was suggested by Tocqueville in what appeared to him as the monotony of an "excited community." A love of riches lay at the bottom of everything Americans did, and eventually this love served to homogenize the passions of men together with the actions whereby they gratified those passions. Thus, a regularity of habit and conduct emerged from moral disorder: "The stronger the passion is, the more regular are these habits and the more uniform are these acts. It may be said that it is the vehemence of their desires that makes the Americans so methodical; it perturbs their minds, but it disciplines their lives." Observation and reflection persuaded Tocqueville that while democratic society liberated the desires of men and disposed them to perpetual change, at the same time it diminished the capacity of each individual and required a settled order for the gratification of those desires.

Harrington predicted that the maintenance of the appetitive balance in an equalitarian society would bring the empire of the whole world under the sway of the everlasting commonwealth. As Tocqueville viewed the prospect two centuries later, variety was disappearing from the human race as all men, insensibly and in isolation from one another, drew nearer to one another. Men were becoming alike without ever having imitated one another, and a similar condition of society developed everywhere as the democratic order spread. The final result, Tocqueville thought, might not simply be constant change but the extinction of humanity through an absorption in "bootless and solitary trifling." While men will remain "in continual motion...humanity will cease to advance." The paradox of the modern science of politics is that the more individual and social disorder are heightened, the more stable
political order becomes; the more estranged men grow from themselves and from each other, the more alike they become. Tocqueville and others have claimed that the American science of politics was the best possible under historical circumstances. Perhaps political success can only be achieved in proportion to the diminishment of the person and attenuation of community.


3 Arthur O. Lovejoy, Reflections on Human Nature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1961), pp. 46-47. Among the extensive writings on Federalist political theory the essay of James P. Scanlan, “The Federalist and Human Nature,” Review of Politics, 21 (1959), 657-77, deals with the psychologization of politics, though Scanlan does not develop its implications. In a recent essay, “Political Obligation and the Brutish in Man,” Review of Politics, 33 (1971), 95-121, Ellis Sandoz links the deterioration of community in America to the “libidinous” orientation of its politics, maintaining that modern reform may be seen as “a conscientious attempt . . . to optimize the satisfaction of the acquisitive lust of the entire citizenry through social, economic and political reform” (p. 114). If Sandoz had interpreted the Federalist achievement differently, he would not be forced to view our subsequent experience as discontinuous.


6 The Federalist, no. 10.


9 Ibid., p. 244.

10 The Federalist, no. 10.

11 The Federalist, no. 76.

12 The Federalist, no. 10.

13 Ibid.
Alienation and American Science of Politics

15 The Federalist, no. 10.
16 The Federalist, no. 51.
17 Ibid.
18 The Federalist, no. 72.
19 Ibid.
20 The Federalist, no. 51.
21 See, for example, The Federalist, nos. 42, 48, 49, 50, 55, 72.
22 The Federalist, no. 51.
25 The Federalist, no. 51.
26 See Tocqueville, pt. II, bk. II, ch. xiii. In his two essays cited above Martin Diamond states that the Federalist formula for republican liberty corresponds to what Tocqueville called “the principle of self-interest rightly understood” (see pt. II, bk. II, ch. viii) and that it demands the absence of any rigid barriers to the ceaseless pursuit of immediate interest. Diamond rightly points out the complementary nature of the Madisonian solution, the public dimension of democracy, and Franklinian utilitarianism, the private aspect of the democratic spirit. Neither he nor Tocqueville pressed the utilitarian defense of democracy to its conclusions. Diamond expresses some apprehension over the effects of the utilitarian calculus for the life of the mind in America. Tocqueville, more radically, indicated the possible moral and social consequences, if certain beliefs and institutions did not continue to mitigate the impact of the calculus, but he stopped short of saying there was nothing to prevent the logic of the calculus from ultimately corroding those very mollifying beliefs and institutions.
27 The Federalist, nos. 15 and 20.
28 The Federalist, no. 15.
29 The Federalist, no. 16.
30 The Federalist, no. 27.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
35 The Federalist, no. 43.
36 The Federalist, no. 51.
37 Ibid.
38 See The Federalist, nos. 1-3, 14, 20, 23, 42, 45, 56, 85.
40 The Federalist, no. 9.
Interpretation

44 *The Federalist*, no. 7.
45 Harrington, p. 69.
47 *Ibid*.
48 *Ibid*.
50 *Ibid*.
51 *The Federalist*, no. 6.
52 Harrington, p. 187.
56 See Hume's essays, "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science" and "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" in *Essays*. Douglass Adair established Madison's debt to Hume, and Irving Brant has shown the conjunction between civil and religious liberty for Madison. See Douglass Adair, "'That Politics May be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth *Federalist*," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 20 (1957), 343-60; and Irving Brant, "Madison: On the Separation of Church and State," *William and Mary Quarterly*, NS3 (1951), 3-24.
57 *The Federalist*, no. 51.
58 *Ibid*.
61 See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 198-202. In "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume says that along with enthusiasm "sound reason and philosophy" are enemies to priestly religion.
63 *Ibid*.
73 Ibid.
74 James Madison to William T. Barry, August 4, 1822, in The Mind of the Founder, p. 441.
76 Ibid., p. 442.
77 Ibid.
78 Tocqueville, pt. II, bk. II. ch. ii.
79 Ibid., ch. xiii.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., bk. III, ch. xvii.
82 Ibid., ch. xxi.
83 Ibid.
ESSAY-REVIEW:


WILL MORRISEY

Looking through a collection of scholarly essays too often reminds us of looking through an ‘antique’ shop; hoping for something valuable, knowing that, at best, there may be something useful. But he who browses in Professor Horwitz’s volume shall probably stay to admire, for several essays are valuable and all are useful.

Every political founding bases itself on moral or ethical principles, but the Americans differ from some other nations in knowing this. Although this volume’s ten contributors frequently disagree with one another on the rightness and the effects of our moral foundations, none disagrees that such foundations exist. Exist: they are ours, not only those of a small late-eighteenth-century republic; in two senses, then, this volume is no ‘antique’ shop.

The first two essays—Robert A. Goldwin’s “Of Men and Angels: A Search for Morality in the Constitution,” and Benjamin R. Barber’s “The Compromised Republic: Public Purposelessness in America”—introduce the major themes that recur throughout.

Goldwin divides his essay into three main parts. In each he answers a self-posed question concerning our moral foundations as embodied by the Constitution. The first question is: Why do we have to look for morality in the Constitution? He answers, in effect, that we look for it there because we look for it everywhere. It is our nature as Americans. Further, “the two basic American moral facts are that immorality is unavoidable [because men are not angels but here they are at liberty] and unacceptable [because we are ‘unrelenting moral judges’].”1 We attempt to reconcile this tension by combining (not synthesizing) “noble principle and self-interest.”2 Unlike many fashionable writers, Goldwin does not regard this combination as hypocritical. It less debases moral principles than ennobles the many
interested selves. Hence we see American politicians ruined by displays of immorality tolerated in other countries.

For this Goldwin thanks our Constitution. His second question is: What is meant by the Constitution? The question matters here because although he cites religious and economic causes of our moral foundations, he regards politics as the architectonic art. In the central passage of this central section—the passage is also central to the essay—he quotes Aristotle: “Lawgivers make the citizens good by training them in habits of right action—that is the aim of all lawmaking, and if it fails to do this it is a failure; this is what distinguishes a good Constitution from a bad one.”

The American Constitution, Goldwin adds, “seeks to train us in habits of restraint and moderation, because that is the only way ambitious officeholders can contend with other ambitious officeholders without falling victim to the law, or to power struggles.”

Such habits of restraint and moderation do not, however, yield harmony. Goldwin felicitously refutes the Newtonian analogy, so dear to the imprecise. The founders, he shows, did not seek the harmony of the heavenly spheres (the realm of angels) when they arranged their system of checks and balances. Everyday tumult, not beatific peace, results from that system. It seems to me that the principle of balanced conflict raised to the level of nature resembles the paradox, familiar to the Greeks and to eighteenth-century thinkers, of the concordia discors. As Goldwin hints by his use of Aristotle, the difference between the concordia discors of the Greeks and that of, say, Adam Smith, is that the former has a telos that exceeds the sum of its parts and the latter does not. The Greek version therefore tends toward concordia, the eighteenth-century version toward discors. (That, incidentally, is the point of the volume’s final essay; its beginning anticipates its end.) It should go without saying that Greek theory does not reflect Greek practice in this respect.

Our problematic quasi-telos makes moderation all the more important for us and all the more difficult. Goldwin’s third question is: What morality is possible and appropriate for America? Moderation, obviously, is appropriate; the Constitution makes it possible, but a rhetoric is necessary to make it actual. If the telos of the whole is vague, even dubious (although the telos of the parts, the individual citizens, is less so), moderation is hard to defend. I should moderate
myself? What for? Inevitably, what do I get out of it if I do? Extreme individualism yields, for example, resentment. Goldwin’s description of Lincoln’s position on slavery (“the chief task was less to punish wrongdoers than to right the wrong”) represents a telos-oriented, not intention-oriented, ethic which eschewed resentment. And Lincoln was, to say the least, a successful politician. But one must ask of Goldwin: What could a Lincoln say now? Recent events suggest that resentment rules many souls. Resentment, a passion usually directed ad hominem, intensifies periodically in American history; it reflects our individualism, which aims more easily at persons than at shared ethical standards. The unstated suggestion of Goldwin’s essay is that rhetoric and law alone may not suffice, that the Lincolnnian magnanimity which overcomes extreme resentment has always been a rare thing, and seems rarer today.

Barber sees the problem Goldwin sees, stating it rather more baldly. He contends that “America has never had enduring public purposes and . . . for a long time this was properly taken to be one of the nation’s fundamental strengths . . .” A public purpose is not identical to a regime’s telos; Barber writes that our “faith has always been that from the clash of opposites . . . will come not the victory of any one but the mediation and accommodation of them all.” Our public telos, then, has been the partial satisfaction of private interests. America’s geography and people were unsuited to the republicanism of Montesquieu and Rousseau, and the Founders’ institutions were “surrogates for pristine republican institutions that could not function under America’s unique conditions.”

Barber contends that today those conditions have been reversed. Increased population limits abundance; we can no longer believe inequality a temporary thing—the assumption being that equality of property contributes to the public good. It also causes representatives to be irresponsible and citizens to be apathetic. Barber calls for “periodic redistricting in accordance with crucial demographic and economic developments.” Whether that would assuage “alienation,” “rootlessness” and “solitude” might be seriously debated in the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, were it still in existence. And I notice that when Barber faults the Constitution for being outdated he fails to mention the existence of modern communications, which must, at least potentially, strengthen the
bonds between representatives and citizens. But when he lists institutional props for his own system, he does not neglect to include modern communications.

On a deeper level, he suggests that the cause of alienation, rootlessness and solitude is "modernity itself," the "Baconian hubris" which would conquer nature: an aspect of the individualism he and Goldwin describe. His egalitarianism, then, does not exclude all kinds of selectiveness, any more than, say, Rousseau's does. Republicanism, he contends, must be founded "on notions of accommodation to nature and mutuality among men," on "independence," "self-realization" and "freedom." He seems to combine some ancient political ideas with much Rousseau. The question is: To what extent can the deeply modern Rousseau overcome modernity?

* *

The next two contributors discuss our moral foundations with reference less to present circumstances than to the founders, their ideas and their circumstances. The late Martin Diamond's "Ethics and Politics: The American Way" is, to my knowledge, his final and best statement of a career's work on the American founding. Richard Hofstadter's "The Founding Fathers: An Age of Realism" (a chapter from his widely distributed The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It) is a popular analysis that few undergraduate history or political science majors don't encounter.

In the opening pages of his essay, Diamond treats explicitly what Goldwin suggests: the relation of ethics to politics. Seldom has that relation been illuminated with such lucidity and grace. Today, he observes, the word "morality" usually signifies "negative prohibitions on what governments and men may do"; positively stated, morality today signifies rights, not virtues. Aristotle thought otherwise (and recall that Goldwin admires Aristotle). Aristotelian virtues are: "all those qualities required for the full development of humanness... that comprise the health or completion of human character." Completion, of course, is one aspect of telos; insofar as modern morality looks to origins not ends, emphasizes rights not virtues, it is fundamentally incomplete. An ethos is an ethics-pattern, distinctive to each regime. It is distinctive because each regime is
distinctive, and “the political order or the regime”\textsuperscript{14}—its constitution in the comprehensive sense—contributes more than anything else to the formation of an ethos. The polis results from ethical need (men are political animals, Aristotle wrote); it is an “association for the formation of character”\textsuperscript{15}—that is its telos. “The question of how these character-forming ethical excellences [virtues] are to be developed in man is what links ethics and politics.”\textsuperscript{16}

The title of the volume refers to the moral, not the ethical, foundations of the American republic. In modernity character-formation becomes secondary to liberty and economy. Whereas Goldwin finds the American regime problematic because it lacks a well-defined telos, Diamond believes America isn’t fully political in the Aristotelian sense.

He writes that we owe our distinctively modern politics to Madison above the other founders, and Madison owed his celebrated treatment of faction in the tenth Federalist to Hume, who was no ancient. Madison, as Diamond interprets him, regarded the improvement of citizens’ opinions as “too risky to rely on,” preferring to tame or devitalize religious and political opinions, and “not so much” to improve them.\textsuperscript{17} Further, Madison wanted to avoid passionate attachment to leaders and to distribute property somewhat unequally; the former prevents one kind of faction, the latter causes a mild faction based on economic competition instead of the more virulent religious and political faction. He thus preferred moderate discord to the attempt for harmony, which yields extreme discord. If modern political thought “had begun a kind of depoliticizing of politics in general” (a de-ethicizing, then, as well), Madison contributed to that enterprise by “depoliticiz[ing] political opinion in particular.”\textsuperscript{18} He thus “deliberately risk[ed] magnifying and multiplying in American life the selfish, the interested, the vulgar, and the crassly economic.”\textsuperscript{19}

But for the first time Diamond seeks to go beyond Madison in defining “American-ness.” He distinguishes avarice—the desire to possess—from the preferred American desire, acquisitiveness—the desire to earn. Acquisitiveness encourages such modest virtues as honesty, industry, partial liberality and some justice: a kind of moderation. One thinks of Montesquieu and Tocqueville, both of whom Diamond cites. Most interestingly, Diamond observes that Madison himself thought the “political truths” of the Bill of Rights
“counteract the impulses of interest and passion” as citizens are habituated to them.20 (Paul Eidelberg, in his A Discourse on Statesmanship, quotes this same passage21; the dialogue between Diamond and Eidelberg was one of the few genuinely serious political dialogues of our time, deserving the attention of all careful students of the founding.) Clearly, the next investigation would be a careful analysis of the Bill of Rights. Perhaps Professor Diamond would have given us such an analysis; now his work can only be continued by we who have learned from him.

Hofstader’s argument—that the founders were Calvinistic, Hobbesian and therefore undemocratic—is sufficiently well-known to require no summary. Goldwin refutes his contention that the Constitution is a Newtonian document; Diamond, writing with care, subtly criticizes his “humanism,” which is really the historicist belief that one can change human nature by changing economic conditions. I find Hofstader’s rhetoric entertaining; the ping-pong ball of his argument bounces from biography to ideas, back and forth, heedless of the logical net that separates them. I would rather read this piece before Diamond’s—it being traditional in a dialogue (and that is one of the things this book is) to move from fashionable arguments to less fashionable ones. Physically placing it before Diamond’s, however, would have the disadvantage of making it central to the first half of the volume; fortunately, teachers need not assign readings in the order they appear.

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If one were to group Joseph Cropsey’s “The United States as Regime and the Sources of the American Way of Life” with any of the other essays, one would group it with Diamond and Hofstader—and as the culmination of the first half of the book. But I prefer to think of it as the book’s central essay (in fact it is the fifth of ten), radiating insight, illuminating (if I may be forgiven a Newtonian metaphor) the planets that revolve around it.

The American regime has a legal, coercive “political fragment,” but “every other element is subject to ongoing thought”: thought, which is private, not political, a matter of chance.22 The “regime is what teaches us to be what we are, and intrusive thought, alien to the
regime but unrepressed by the regime, teaches us to be dissatisfied with what we are and, incidentally, with the regime that teaches us to be what we are.”

Moreover, the regime itself “includes both what we are dissatisfied with and what provokes us to see that we must be dissatisfied with it.”

This insight comprehends the liberty/morality tension Goldwin sees and the economics/politics tension Diamond sees.

Thus “the regime is problematic with a view to its own persistence and to the manner in which it determines the way of life of the nation—not fully a regime. Beyond the founding there is religion, but within the founding itself there are two modernities: “From its inception modernity has exhibited two moral meanings or tendencies, one inspiriting, reminding man of his earthbound solitude and presenting the world as an opportunity for greatness of some description, the other pointing toward survival, security, and freedom to cultivate the private and privately felt predilections”: Machiavelli versus Hobbes and Locke. Hence modernity’s—our—self-criticism. “The United States is an arena in which modernity is working itself out.”

(On this, incidentally, I suspect that Machiavelli contains his own “bourgeoisification,” because his excision of wisdom, both ancient and Scriptural, from politics while retaining thymos leaves thymos vulnerable to seduction [cf. Mandragola!].)

As Cropsey traces the metamorphoses of modern political thought an interesting shift occurs. At first he finds the present understanding of “Scripture” and of natural science to be of modernity; later, he exempts them partially (Cartesian natural science, for example, “brings together the moral fortitude or spiritual toughness that the way of science both demands and cultivates, and the promise that science holds out for prolonging life and emending souls. . . .”); he finally writes that both have been “transformed into, or made ministerial [!] to, the mollifying or indolent.” Although he does not say it, this shift may parallel an important philosophic metamorphosis. In the essay’s central passage Cropsey states that the “change of focus from nature to history [completed by Hegel] produced no mitigation of modern man’s dissatisfaction with the absence of any exaltation, vivacity, or high-heartedness from official political modernity as laid down by Hobbes and Locke” but, rather, increased it. “Scripture” and natural science “both presuppose a universe that is ultimately mysterious and in which the most important things
can yet be known to man, especially the truth that there is a one, or absolute, the being of which dominates the whole.”

Cropsey tells us, subtly, that historicism attempts to reveal that absolute, but fails. Rather, modernity’s “dialectic”—which for Cropsey is neither Hegelian nor Marxian—is one in which “the indulgent silently consumes the inspiriting.” It would seem that historicism deliberately intensified modernity’s self-criticism and undeliberately intensified its apparent opposite, self-indulgence.

But Cropsey’s analysis becomes still more comprehensive. Modernity in some way resembles pre-modernity, and “self-criticism” is itself a Western, not only a modern, phenomenon. Self-criticism requires a self to criticize; individualism (that which makes political life problematic) is a Western phenomenon, exaggerated but not invented by modernity. If “Modernity has grown by consuming itself,” so has the West.

That leads to some final questions. If “the highest task of political philosophy is to understand, as the highest task of statesmanship is to govern, the relation of political life to thought” (a statement that reveals the importance of historicism—the doctrine that would unify theory and practice) then philosophy itself, philosophy conceived as dialectic, is at tension with politics. Is political philosophy by nature paradoxical? Goldwin’s question—How does one find a rhetoric of moderation?—is one aspect of the fundamental problem of statesmanship, which must govern the relation of something that is political to something that is not. As magnanimity, the comprehensive virtue, seems the only response to Goldwin’s question, so some yet more comprehensive thought-system seems the only response to Cropsey’s. That is to say that of all these essays, Cropsey’s is the one which leaves an attentive reader with the most fundamental questions: the mark, perhaps, of a philosopher.

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Gordon S. Wood’s “Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution” and Robert H. Horwitz’s “John Locke and the Preservation of Liberty: A Perennial Problem of Civic Education” treat the thought/politics theme as embodied in the work of the Founders and that of their major philosophic precursor. This section parallels, therefore, the Diamond/Hofstadter section rather than the Goldwin/Barber section, and appropriately follows Cropsey.
Wood contends that at the time of the founding “ideas and power, intellectualism and politics, came together—indeed were one with each other—in a way never again duplicated in American history.”[^34] The Founders unintentionally “helped create the changes that led eventually to their own undoing.”[^35] They founded a regime in which egalitarianism rules, aided by such instruments of mass-communication as the printing press. “The Federalists found it increasingly difficult to publicly speak the truth as they saw it and not get punished for it.”[^36] They were unable to find a rhetoric that could defend “elitism” in an anti-“elitist” world; deference waned. (On this, one might consider the possible relation of deference and moderation, egalitarianism and immoderation—recalling Goldwin.) That our Revolution “contributed to [the] . . . demise” of this “remarkable group of men” illustrates its “transforming democratic radicalism.”[^37]

Of the two historians whose contributions appear in this volume, Hofstadter writes more stylishly, Wood more thoughtfully. Whether “the democratization of the American mind” was caused by “the Revolution” itself, or rather by the political ingenuity of Thomas Jefferson and others, is a question whose answer wouldn’t conceal our Constitution’s susceptibility to that democratization.

Horwitz shows that “neither the Federalists nor the Anti-Federalists provided an adequate analysis of the character and place of civic virtue in the American Republic and the need for some form of civic education.”[^38] Both wanted to insure liberty, natural rights—one by instituting a commercial republic, one by imposing the strict self-discipline of Samuel Adams’s “Christian Sparta.” For such an analysis we should turn not to statesmen but to a philosopher: John Locke.

Locke, in Horwitz’s words, believed that “a republic based essentially on the pursuit of private interest can still develop those virtues that are ultimately indispensable to the maintenance of liberty”[^39] if there exists in that republic a rightly-educated gentleman-class (not to be confused with the titled ‘nobility’). The inept methods and overly-Christian doctrines of public education could be avoided by the engagement of a right-minded private tutor (the privacy of Lockean education reminds us of Diamond’s point on the modern “depoliticization” of politics). In Some Thoughts
Concerning Education Locke tutors not the tutor but the parents who shall select him.

Central to understanding Lockean civic (and therefore, in part, moral) education is what Locke calls the "law of opinion." Credit and disgrace powerfully reward and punish children and adults, alike. Whereas the public educators of the day attempted to suppress the passions by physical punishment, Locke finds that mental reward and punishment redirect the passions, habituating the child to defer them, to develop the idea of "self-interest rightly understood." Hence the patriotism necessary to defend liberty—even to the point of risking death—stems from the "law of opinion" and the educational method consonant with it. Even the authority of the gentleman-class itself stems from that law, for in a well-ordered republic ordinary citizens would defer to those who, in the modern phrase, "make opinion." This illuminates the link between deference and moderation.

That raises an important question. Love of credit and fear of disgrace bespeak individualism; they also limit it. A critic of Locke would surely ask if this were not evidence of natural human sociality, which Locke's state-of-nature doctrine precludes. Locke would reply, I think, that praise and blame cause sensations of mental pleasure and pain; those sensations are natural, but the forms they take are conventional, post-state-of-nature. Still, one might insist that there is something about that tabula, allegedly rasa, which causes it to respond to those rewards and punishments, and more readily than to others. If Locke argues that one can write anything on a tabula rasa, his critic, waxing polemical, could agree—citing the Essay [on] Civil Government as an example (the unpolemical point being that if one maximizes the "rasa" aspect of the tabula there is then no more justification for calling man naturally a-social than there is for calling him naturally social, political or anything more than naturally sentient).

It is possible that Locke conceals the tension Horwitz describes in the beginning of his essay. The Christian Sparta (itself problematic) vied with the commercical republic. But the tradition of the Christian Sparta did not die. It persisted in American literature for decades, and occasionally manifests itself in various odd idealisms even today. The pitchfork of individualism can't quite expel sociality and, ultimately, politics.
Interpretation

In his final sentence Horwitz asks, "is such an educational program possible today, and, if so, by whom would it be developed and who would be its proper recipients?" In asking that he reminds us of Goldwin, Cropsey, Wood. For today the exemplary people are those who embody or symbolize passions or appetites. 'Sex goddess': is that not laughably apt?

It is enough to make one turn to religion. With Walter Berns. His "Religion and the Founding Principle," central to the volume's second half, begins the final section, which includes Wilson Carey McWilliams's "On Equality as the Moral Foundation for Community" and the late Herbert J. Storing's "Slavery and the Moral Foundations of the American Republic."

Berns offers us no consolation. He shows that undiscriminating toleration (or, as they say now, "pluralism") was not what Jefferson and the others had in mind. The founders "all agreed that our institutions do not presuppose a providential Supreme Being," but that "their preservation does" (it seems that the pitchfork of individualism mortally wounds itself if it impales its enemy).

Jefferson, for example, believed that the religion of the unenlightened supports modern natural right (which is no Christian doctrine). One reconciles Christianity to modern natural right by making Christianity reasonable: one of Locke's projects. Thus we learn of "Nature's God" in the Declaration; one might say that Berns centrally asserts that America replaces Christianity with Lockean natural right. Further, commerce makes men forget religion—replacing, as Diamond might say, an extreme passion with a manageable one. Religious toleration can only rest on what is regarded as political truth. Paradoxically, political truth is then more, as it were, sacred than religious belief; the Jefferson who tolerated any reasonable Christianity tolerated only the self-evidently rational politics of modern natural right.

There are, I observe, kinds of passions. Economic passions are appetites, directed toward the individual. Religious passion directs itself beyond the individual. Paradoxically, reason seems to be a better weapon against transcendent passion than against "natural" appetite passion. It seems that Jeffersonianism depends on the
progress of "Enlightenment": misplaced faith, it now seems clear. "Democratization" is one thing, "Enlightenment" another. The latter destroys the basis of Lockean deference.

Jefferson is an enthusiasm of McWilliams's, although the rationale of his enthusiasm seems problematic. His essay, among the better ones in the volume, is also, surely, the oddest.

Although "equality is apparently the conquering dogma of the age," McWilliams thinks that "contemporary humanity is at best ambivalent about equality," that "the cry for equality is too often only the rhetorical disguise for values much closer to the modern heart." Modernity defines "equality" as something external and merely individualistic: equality of having and doing, that is, "equality of treatment." Because that allows the individual to reject the possibility that he is equal to others (imagining his own superiority while asserting his equality), the demand for equality of treatment is usually a means to eventual domination. (One thinks of Marx's proletarian dictatorship.) But true equality, to McWilliams, is a matter not of having and doing but of being—in the case of man, it is a matter of being human. True equality is something internal and political, not external and economic.

McWilliams defines "humanity's essential quality"—the basis of true equality—as our natural seeking of self-knowledge and the good life. All men, equally, seek that—although, obviously, each may seek it differently. Contemporary political philosophers "are led toward teleological arguments regarding the natural end of humanity, even though their presumptions and training compel them to stop short of that teaching." It is a credit to McWilliams's subtlety that he almost does not stop short of that teaching. On the problem of telos that we've seen so often here, he argues for a new regime in which citizens honor "common values"—presumably, those based on true equality. He recognizes that in the "exchange societies" advocated by capitalists and radicals alike, "power over others—not equality with them—remains the highest social value." He prefers "humane or nurturant authority" which does not yield equality of treatment, but which would aim at encouraging our natural seeking of self-knowledge and the good life. He traces the history of political philosophy from the "classics" or "ancients" to the "moderns" and to the American founders, showing that Plato and
Aristotle understood true equality far better than their successors. Moreover, he soberly recognizes the practical difficulty of actualizing the "inward sense of equality and commonality" that he admires; central to his essay is the observation that, for the classics, "The philosophical perception of human equality... was a kind of mystery, an ideal and a truth safe only for adequately prepared initiates."50

I wrote that McWilliams almost does not stop short of classical teleology. By emphasizing the seeking, not the achievement, he is able to argue that we are all equally human. One might contend, following McWilliams, that the most tiresome Manhattan socialite, recalling his or her banal fantasies on a psychiatrist's couch, seeks self-knowledge and the good life with as much eros as Socrates. That resembles Aristotle less than it does Rousseau, who shifted the emphasis of politics from the common good to the General Will: the agglomerate of individual wills, each of which fervently seeks the good for itself, although the individual's idea of the good may in fact be wrong. Aristotle defines humanity in terms of virtues (recall Diamond); to be fully human is to have developed the distinctively human virtues. Aristotle would therefore regard Socrates as more fully human than the Manhattan socialite. "Equality in the classical sense was not merely formal or material," McWilliams writes; "it involved an internal sense of equality, a concern for the good of the whole..."51 In melding the efficient with the final cause, McWilliams departs from the classics, perhaps knowingly.

This accounts, I think, for his enthusiasm for Jefferson, who was no ancient. Jefferson believed in an inner "moral sense," the basis of his egalitarianism, which caused him to value "political community [his polis-like "ward republics"] for moral education and especially for education in the perception of equality."52 But Jefferson's morality, as McWilliams sees, is a matter of sentiment, not reason. In that respect it derives from modern subjectivism: Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, Rousseau. McWilliams seems to desire a synthesis of ancient and modern political philosophy.

As is prudent, he reminds us that "Of course, we cannot realize [the true politics of the ancient polis] in our great industrial states; size alone prevents it, and those who have attempted to impose civic equality on such states have only created monstrosities."53 Rather, he proposes less grandiose changes to "revitalize our political life as
far as circumstances permit."^54 He is a genuine radical, and therefore a moderate in his own way.

Any regime that professes to admire equality and liberty should find slavery repugnant. To have tolerated it is to have swallowed that repugnance: poison to the body politic. In his essay on the relation of slavery to our moral foundations, Storing confronts our most extreme ethical failure.

I hope (in vain, I am sure) that some of our yeastier polemicists can read and understand this essay. Storing wrecks the hackneyed arguments: Jefferson—was—a-slaveholder—and—therefore—a-hypocrite; the-Constitution-made-the-Negro-three-fifths-of-a-man, and the rest. He directs our attention to Frederick Douglass, who may have been the most magnanimous (in Aristotle’s sense) of Americans. He shows that “these masters knew that they were writing the texts in which their slaves would learn their rights.”^55

Yet Storing criticizes the founders, moderately and radically. “That very principle of individual liberty for which the founders worked... contains within itself an uncomfortably large opening toward slavery.”^56 With McWilliams, and others, he sees that individual rights, defined as self-interest, nearly counsel one that “one may do what one can do.”^57 Such are “the political and moral defects of mere individualism.”^58

One thing might be added to his essay, in view of the preceding ones. Although “the American founders and their immediate descendents... not only believed in but emphasized the wrongness of slavery,”^59 the generations of politicians who followed those descendents did not emphasize it. If we agree with Wood that America’s mind was “democratized”—due to the efforts of Jefferson, admittedly, but remembering that Jefferson, unlike many of his peers, believed that “democratization” brought ‘Enlightenment’—we come to the seeming paradox that increased “democratization” (less natural and conventional aristocracy, more egalitarianism in the ordinary sense) yielded more racial discrimination, not less. The aristoi who framed the Constitution, being genuine or natural aristoi, resisted many of “the political and moral defects of mere individualism.” Their “democratized,” vulgar-ized grandchildren did not. Democracy with liberty yielded less equality, not more. Democracy
without liberty, as we know, yields the same problem, only worsened.

* 

I offer an egalitarian compliment to the editor and contributors: Any person who seriously wants to learn about our country can learn from them. The dialogue between the contributors, as with any carefully-arranged dialogue, shall teach every student according to his nature, whether it be the nature of a college sophomore, a professor, or one unattached to academia. Insofar as these students partake of America’s Lockean component, they shall find the $2.95 price assigned by the University Press of Virginia truly satisfying.

I also offer two suggestions to the editor and the publisher: for the second edition, commission an article on the problem of conducting foreign policy in our regime; for the next printing, add a good index.

All references are to the reviewed text, unless otherwise noted.

1 Goldwin, p. 6.
2 Goldwin, p. 4.
3 Goldwin, pp. 9-10. Aristotle quote taken from Nichomachean Ethics, Bk. 2, 1103b.
4 Goldwin, p. 10.
6 Barber, p. 20.
7 Barber, p. 24.
8 Barber, p. 36.
9 Barber, pp. 37-38.
10 Barber, p. 38.
11 Barber, p. 38.
12 Diamond, p. 40. Men are not angels, Publius wrote.
13 Diamond, p. 41.
14 Diamond, p. 42.
15 Diamond, p. 43.
16 Diamond, p. 44.
17 Diamond, p. 53.
18 Diamond, p. 56.
19 Diamond, p. 59.
20 Diamond, p. 71.
22 Cropsey, p. 88.
23 Cropsey, p. 88.
24 Cropsey, p. 88.
25 Cropsey, p. 88.
26 Cropsey, p. 92.
27 Cropsey, p. 92.
28 Cropsey, p. 94.
29 Cropsey, p. 93.
30 Cropsey, p. 98.
31 Cropsey, p. 100.
32 Cropsey, p. 95.
33 Cropsey, p. 101.
34 Wood, pp. 102-03.
35 Wood, p. 103.
36 Wood, p. 119.
37 Wood, p. 128.
38 Horwitz, p. 133.
39 Horwitz, p. 133-34.
40 Horwitz, p. 156.
This essay is a partially revised version of Chapter 1 of Berns's remarkable book, *The First Amendment and the Future of American Democracy* (Basic Books, New York, 1976, pp. 1-32). The present essay is even better than the original; there is a significant shift of emphasis concerning the theme of the relative 'sanctity' of religion and politics in America, too subtle to express in this limited space.

Berns, p. 165.

McWilliams, p. 182.

McWilliams, p. 184.

McWilliams, p. 189.

McWilliams, p. 189.

McWilliams, p. 185.

McWilliams, p. 186.

McWilliams, p. 190.

McWilliams, p. 197.

McWilliams, pp. 192-93

McWilliams, pp. 209-10.

McWilliams, p. 212.

McWilliams, p. 212.

Storing, p. 225.


Storing, p. 226.

Storing, pp. 232-33.

Storing, p. 220.
Arendt analyzes the “vita contemplativa” into thinking, willing, and judging, thereby nearly completing the “arch” begun with (and repeating the symmetry of) *The Human Condition* where the “vita activa” is divided into labor, work, and action. Work, in *The Human Condition*, is presented as the activity which produces an artificial world of things, while labor is presented as the activity which produces vital necessities and in doing so corresponds to the processes of the human body; but both work and labor, as construed by the Classical Mind, are slavish activities since their end is the maintenance of life. Action, unmediated activity between men, is the only component of the “vita activa” worthy of a free man; the “political,” consequently, is supreme in the “vita activa.” This symmetry is repeated in *The Life of the Mind* where willing is presented as the power of spontaneously beginning a series of things, and judging is presented as the making manifest of thinking in the world of appearances; but both willing and judging have particulars as their objects. Thinking alone has the universal as its object and is therefore supreme in the “vita contemplativa.” Arendt distinguishes thinking (the quest for meaning) from knowing (the quest for truth); since the “vita contemplativa,” as understood by the Classical Mind, is superior to the “vita activa,” the quest for meaning found in the raising of “unanswerable questions” is the highest activity for man.

*The Human Condition* dramatizes the Modern Mind’s inversion of the Classical hierarchy of the “vita activa.” Action and work are made subservient to labor, and this entails a redefinition of man, made explicit by Marx, as the “animal laborans.” All ‘use’ objects (those of work) become ‘consumption’ objects (those of labor), as the industrial revolution replaces workmanship with labor and pushes the “animal laborans” into the public realm. The “political” can no longer be supreme in the “vita activa” since the only thing men have
in common is their private interests—private activities displayed in the open. The distinction between the “vita activa” and the “vita contemplativa” is erased and thinking comes to be interpreted as one among several manifestations of the “vita activa.” *The Life of the Mind* dramatizes the Modern Mind’s inversion of the Classical hierarchy of the “vita contemplativa.” Thinking and judging are made subservient to willing, and this entails a redefinition of man as the undetermined being, the being of unqualified freedom, whose selfhood transcends both the political and natural orders. By virtue of its notion of progress, the Modern Mind shifts its understanding of the future from the Classical “that which approaches us” to that which we determine by the projects of the will. Modern technology is thereby made possible as “the will to will,” that is, the will to subject the whole world to its domination and rulership.

These are the rudiments of the “arch” constituted by *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*; but this “arch” is unfinished. At the time of her death in 1975 Arendt had not started the section on judging; her plan was that this section could be much shorter than the sections on thinking and willing and that it would simply be appended to the second volume of *The Life of the Mind*. But the moral question she poses at the beginning of this work, a question which emerges out of her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* where she speaks about the “banality of evil,” namely, whether thinking could be one of the conditions for men’s abstaining from evil, is never really satisfactorily answered by her analysis of thinking and willing. It appears that only an analysis of *judging*, where we find the ability not only to distinguish the beautiful from the ugly but the right from the wrong, would be a satisfactory answer to this question.

Yet, if the “arch” is unfinished, it does present a certain grandeur when viewed from the vantage point of contemporary experience. This grandeur is reflected in her hopes and expectations for the future of thinking.

She places herself in the company of those who attempt to “dismantle metaphysics and philosophy with all its categories as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today.” She is interested not in the truth sought by the great thinkers but in their being for us (who live in a time when the “basic distinction between the sensory and the supersensory” has come to an end and where the “thread of tradition is broken” and incapable of being renewed) the
"only clues" to what "thinking means to those who engage in it." The works of great thinkers survive because these works were written in a kind of "timeless time" in which men are able to create "timeless works with which to transcend their own finiteness." We are experiencing today a "shrinkage of time behind us that is no less decisive than the shrinkage of spatial distances on the earth," so that the antiquity of the greatest thinkers is "much closer to us today than it was to our ancestors." As a result, our advantage is in our ability to recapture thinking with a mind "unburdened and unguided by any traditions"; and the only obstacle in the path of the exercise of this ability is the growing contemporary "inability to move, on no matter what level, in the realm of the invisible."

The counterforce to this obstacle, however, is an inclination, "perhaps a need," in men to "think beyond the limitations of knowledge," a need which is not "inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning"—a quest which "permits the mind to withdraw from the world without ever being able to leave it or transcend it." She is confident that the difference between thinking and knowing, along with the breaking of the thread of tradition, have come to the foreground of contemporary consciousness; we are now in a position where we no longer "expect truth to come from thinking," where we no longer "mistake the need to think with the urge to know." We are in a position to see that the experience of the "activity of thought" is the "aboriginal source of our notion of spirituality in itself, regardless of the forms it has assumed." What has come to an end for us is not the possibility of thinking about the ultimates but the "Roman trinity" of "religion, authority, and tradition." What has come to an end for us is theology, philosophy, and metaphysics, as traditionally practised—thinking as the province of a few professionals. If this be so, if thinking still remains for us and if it remains closer than ever, then the intimacy between thinking about ultimate meanings and judging about right and wrong requires that we at long last demand the exercise of thinking from every "sane person, no matter how erudite or ignorant, how intelligent or stupid, he may happen to be." Her expectation is that at last "the many" will be open to the possibility of experiencing what, in the words of Coleridge, was only experienced by the "nobler minds" of the past, namely, that there is "within themselves a something ineffably greater than their own individual nature." Her
fervent hope is that in transcending the ties of tradition we are in the position to transcend the "modern identity crisis" which can only be resolved by never being alone and never trying to think."

In the end, however, the grandeur of these hopes and expectations is rooted in the possibility that the quest for truth and the quest for meaning can be "meaningfully" distinguished and separated. But can they? Could it be that the only task that remains for thinking (when it ceases to be directed at the articulation of "what is the case") is precisely what so many of the professional philosophical 'few' take to be philosophy, namely, the construction of "ideal languages"—the arcane intricacies of the new systems of symbolic logic? Could the persistent identification of the quest for meaning and the quest for truth in traditional philosophy, metaphysics, and theology be itself a "clue," to use Arendt's own words, to what "thinking means to those who engage in it"?
BOOK REVIEW:

*Human Reality and the Social World: Ortega's Philosophy of History*  
by Oliver W. Holmes, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975)

MARTIN NOZICK  
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The scholarship done in English on José Ortega y Gasset has been deplorably brief. It seems, however, that the future looks brighter: there have been, recently, two broad-spectrum studies of the Spanish thinker: Robert McClintock's *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator* (New York: 1971), and Harold C. Raley's *José Ortega y Gasset: Philosopher of European Unity*, (University, Ala., University of Alabama Press, 1971). Such works, along with Mr. Holmes’s, may yet rescue Ortega from the limbo of being what Professor James Collins might call a “para-philosopher” in the English-speaking philosophical guild.

With admirable control, Mr. Holmes ranges over the entire corpus of Ortega’s work, from the earliest articles to the posthumous works, with the exception of the aesthetics and most of the politically-oriented essays, and converges on the thinker’s philosophy of history, his “historic reason.” The author, in his “Introduction,” provides an adequate sketch of the philosopher’s early life, the sad state of philosophical inquiry in Spain at the turn of the century, the years Ortega spent in Germany. It is in this section that the professional Hispanists will come across a few minor errors: e.g., Larra referred to as a novelist, the ‘Don’ used without a given name. Above all, the author neglects the catalytic effect of Unamuno’s work on Ortega: indeed, nowhere throughout the book does he suggest that Ortega’s emphasis on man as history is a reaction to Unamuno’s nebulous but poetic metaphors of “infrahistory” (*infra-historia*) and “superhistory.” On more than one occasion did Ortega refer to the respected rector of Salamanca as an “energúmeno” (madman), one who took pleasure in vague outlines, in phantasmagoria, in confusion, rather than contributing to what Spain needed most: light and precision. Indeed, Ortega’s first book *Meditaciones del Quijote* may, among other things, be considered a refutation of Unamuno’s earlier subjective *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. As
against Unamuno's "Tragic Sense of Life," Ortega evolved the "Sportive Origin of the State" and never tired of pointing out that art and philosophy are exhilarating manifestations of the overflow of life's energies.

Again, in his discussion of Ortega's organization of the group "La Agrupación al Servicio de la República" (In Service of the Republic) in 1931, Mr. Holmes makes no mention of Ortega's earlier (1914) Liga de Educación Política and its manifesto Vieja y nueva política. Such facts are important to show that if Ortega was aware of being the "sole begetter" of modern Spanish philosophy, he also considered his role to include that of tutor to his nation in the arts, in education, and in politics. Indeed, if Ortega writes endless variations on the themes of perspectivism and the gerundive (faciendum) nature of man's history, it is to give the lie to those pundits who, like the formidable Menéndez y Pelayo, staunchly maintained that to be Spanish was inseparable from being monarchical and Roman Catholic. Furthermore, Ortega's admiration for German culture is in part an answer to Menéndez y Pelayo's disdainful references to "germanic nebulosities."

But the sweep of Mr. Holmes's discussion of the impact of Germanic thought upon Ortega more than makes up for such oversights. Beginning with a lucid description of the Neo-Kantianism of Cohen and Natorp with whom Ortega studied at Marburg, Holmes goes on to the "historist focus" of Windelband, Rickert and Dilthey, especially the latter to whom Ortega paid such deep homage years later when he actually read his posthumous collected works. At this point Holmes also analyzes the intersection of Croce's historicism and Ortega's philosophy of history, and goes on directly to Ortega's introduction to phenomenology on his return to Marburg in 1911; and it would be less than just to fail to congratulate the author on his discussion of Husserl which constitutes one of the most successful sections of his book, and is on a par with his analysis of the influences of Scheler's Ressentiment and The Nature of Sympathy upon Ortega's central concepts of social and intellectual hierarchy. All we are lacking here is a quasi-indispensable incursion—a step backwards in time, to be sure—into Nietzsche's influence on Ortega. For Ortega borrowed from the sage of the Engadine not only broad attitudes, but also a specific vocabulary such as the adjectives "active" he applies to the "select man" and "reactive" to the "mass
man.” To be sure, as Mr. Holmes’s book unfolds, Nietzsche is not neglected, but various references to him en passant do not dramatize the Nietzsche-Ortega coupling as forcefully as Professor Gonzalo Sobejano does in his *Nietzsche en España*.

There is one more possible oversight that the present reviewer would like to suggest: although Ortega thoroughly acknowledged the debt he owed to his formation in Germany, his concept of “vital reason” is perhaps as much a reaction against the atmosphere of pedantry that reigned in German intellectual circles as against the entire nineteenth-century tradition of idealism. Ortega underlines incessantly his contempt for “la beatería de la cultura,” an almost untranslatable expression but one which may be rendered approximately as “stiffnecked idolatry of culture.” Although, unlike his peer Unamuno (who could not refrain from referring to German culture sardonically as *Kultura*), Ortega was a fervent Germanophile (witness his lifelong adoration of Goethe) and never failed to keep abreast of the scientific publications emanating from that country, there is an obverse side of the medal which is often overlooked: it was in the German universities that he grew fully aware of the learning/life dichotomy.

The pages devoted to Dilthey and Ortega and the affinities between Heidegger and the Spanish writer are among the most enlightening of the book. And we must thank Mr. Holmes for emphatically stating in answer to so many detractors that there is “a fundamental coherence” in Ortega’s philosophical thought (p. 68), even though he confines his judgment to the 1930s, for “he succeeded in fusing the philosophical perspectives of phenomenology, historicism, and intellectualism into a systematic philosophy of men, society, and history,” and confers upon Ortega the cachet of “a philosopher in the traditional European sense of the word.” Thus, once and for all, although Ortega was a journalist, popularizer, book reviewer, tutor to the Spanish-speaking world, we may discard the unfair notion that he was no more than that.

Chapter II, on the historicity of human reality, comes to grips with the central theme or axis of Ortega’s thought: his struggle against abstract rationalism or “utopian” thinking and the distinctions he makes, like Dilthey and others, between the physical sciences and the human sciences, that man has no “essence” but history, that man lives in constant interaction with his “circum-
stances,” the present that surrounds him at a given point but draws from the past and projects into the future. Man is thus different from the stone or the tiger, since the latter are the same as they always were, while man, as he lives, writes his own story, is his own novelist or dramatist. Chapter III, based principally on Ortega’s *Men and People*, discusses in depth Ortega’s sociological views: again, the genesis of society is the “radical reality” of each man’s existence which then opens him up to an awareness of other existences, notions which never fail to crop up in Ortega’s work in diverse contexts. Mr. Holmes goes further: he demonstrates how “Ortega’s phenomenological approach to the importance of transcending individual experience...is...in the tradition of Husserl and...Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.” The “I am I and my circumstance,” enunciated in his first book, is Ortega’s major theme and lends itself to all sorts of orchestrations, sociological, political, pedagogical, aesthetic. The major dereliction (or perhaps, crime) in all thinking is to reduce reality to the ego and to isolate the ego from the ebb and flow of life. But as man finds himself ensconced in the context of his surroundings, he must hearken to himself, his authenticity: he must become what he is, and must especially beware of being swallowed up by mass pressures. Ortega’s most notorious elaboration of the need for the “select man” to resist the dictatorship of “mass man” is worked out in *The Revolt of the Masses* which has had such diffusion that it has overshadowed much of his other work and made of him, in the eyes of the general public, a “one-book author,” and especially the author of a popular book, much to his discredit among his professional confrères.

All of Mr. Holmes’s close reasoning of Ortega’s thought reaches a climax in Chapter IV which concerns itself primarily with Ortega’s philosophy of history and which embraces his concept of the “generation” as the basic unit of historical dynamism, the differences between ideas and convictions (“creencias”), man as a faciendum, not a factum, all falling under the heading of “historical reason” (Dilthey’s *historische Vernunft*) as opposed to “physico-mathematical” or abstract reason. Man is ongoing narrative, and, unlike the stone or tree or animal, has no fixed essence or nature.

Since Mr. Holmes writes lucid prose, it is too bad that he did not take the time to point out the sheer beauty of Ortega’s style, the wealth of his metaphors, the delightful surprises of so many of his
analogy. The Spanish thinker himself claimed repeatedly that clarity was the courtesy of the philosopher and that his purpose was to use "lyrical means" to "seduce" the public into reading philosophy. Not only is Ortega the most significant Spanish philosopher since Suárez—as Julián Marías points out—he is also a consummate stylist with a secure place in the history of belles lettres as well as the history of philosophy.

One thing more: Mr. Holmes's bibliography will prove a joy to all students of Ortega.
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LEO STRAUSS
Essays on the Issues and Themes of His Life-Work


EDITED BY: GEORGE ELLIOTT TUCKER
AT VIENNA, AUSTRIA


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