

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Winter 2018

Volume 44 Issue 2

- 183 *Christine J. Basil & Rachel K. Alexander* Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc: An American Woman?*
- 209 *Alfonso Galindo Hervás* Living Automatically, Living Remotely: On the Contemporary Reduction of Experience and Decision-Making Spaces
- 233 *John C. Koritansky* Natural Justice and the Nature of Justice in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*
- 257 *Alexander Orwin* In Search of the Comprehensive Science: The Way to Philosophy of Alfarabi's Plato
- 277 *Ralph C. Wood* **Review Essay:**
Flannery O'Connor: A Political Companion, edited by Henry T. Edmondson III
- 295 *Marco Andreacchio* **Book Reviews:**
Machiavelli's Politics by Catherine Zuckert
- 303 *Thomas M. J. Bateman* *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* by Bonnie Honig
- 309 *Thomas M. J. Bateman* *Fit for the Presidency?* by Seymour Morris Jr.
- 313 *Jarrett A. Carty* *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, edited by David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara
- 319 *Eric R. Claeys* *The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom* by Thomas G. West
- 325 *Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman* *An Archaeology of the Political: Regimes of Power from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* by Elías José Palti
- 331 *Paul Ludwig* *Rousseau's Rejuvenation of Political Philosophy: A New Introduction* by Nelson Lund
- 339 *Thomas Merrill* *Heidegger and Politics: The Ontology of Radical Discontent* by Alexander S. Duff
- 345 *Jason Neidleman* *Rousseau on Education, Freedom, and Judgment* by Denise Schaeffer
- 351 *John R. Pottenger* *Founding Acts: Constitutional Origins in a Democratic Age* by Serdar Tekin

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Editor-in-Chief Timothy W. Burns, Baylor University

General Editors Charles E. Butterworth • Timothy W. Burns

General Editors (Late) Howard B. White (d. 1974) • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987)
Seth G. Benardete (d. 2001) • Leonard Grey (d. 2009) •
Hilail Gildin (d. 2015)

Consulting Editors Christopher Bruell • David Lowenthal • Harvey C.
Mansfield • Thomas L. Pangle • Ellis Sandoz • Kenneth
W. Thompson

Consulting Editors (Late) Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) •
Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • John Hallowell (d. 1992)
• Ernest L. Fortin (d. 2002) • Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) •
Joseph Cropsey (d. 2012) • Harry V. Jaffa (d. 2015)

International Editors Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier

Editors Peter Ahrens Dorf • Wayne Ambler • Marco Andreacchio •
Maurice Auerbach • Robert Bartlett • Fred Baumann • Eric
Buzzetti • Susan Collins • Patrick Coby • Erik Dempsey •
Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman • Edward J. Erler • Maureen
Feder-Marcus • Robert Goldberg • L. Joseph Hebert •
Pamela K. Jensen • Hannes Kerber • Mark J. Lutz • Daniel
Ian Mark • Ken Masugi • Carol L. McNamara • Will
Morrisey • Amy Nendza • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G.
Rubin • Thomas Schneider • Susan Meld Shell • Geoffrey
T. Sigalet • Nicholas Starr • Devin Stauffer • Bradford P.
Wilson • Cameron Wybrow • Martin D. Yaffe • Catherine
H. Zuckert • Michael P. Zuckert

Copy Editor Les Harris

Designer Sarah Teutschel

Inquiries ***Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy***

Department of Political Science

Baylor University

1 Bear Place, 97276

Waco, TX 76798

email interpretation@baylor.edu

Catherine Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, 512 pp., \$45 (cloth).

Zuckert's Synthesis of Socrates and Machiavelli

MARCO ANDREACCHIO

marcoandreaschio@gmail.com

Catherine Zuckert's volume on Machiavelli presents itself as, and may very well be, the most comprehensive study of Machiavelli available to us. Machiavelli's major works are eloquently examined throughout their multilayered interconnections, whereby historical, rhetorical, and theoretical/philosophical approaches to the Florentine's work are integrated in the interests of comprehensiveness, or so as to minimize partialness (3).¹ Zuckert's own approach is both illuminated by and reflected in the utilitarian message she discerns at the heart of Machiavelli's secularist works: the highest good is a common good coinciding with the satisfaction of the greatest number of

¹ Intertextual references are crucial to Zuckert's work, which emphasizes that every single text by Machiavelli is illuminated and completed by his other texts. The thesis is intriguing, especially considering the manner in which it may be used to neutralize literalist critiques of Machiavelli. Yet the thesis risks at once becoming its own victim, by exposing itself to the relativizing claim that there is no hierarchy of senses, messages, or audiences, and that Machiavelli's final word ought to be read in a "Machiavellian" manner, in terms of a "balance of powers." Zuckert may find coherence in approaching Machiavelli in a Machiavellian manner (33), but the approach risks taking its target for granted, in which case we would neutralize, not merely some literalist critique of Machiavelli, but *all* radical criticism—all criticism open to the essential conditions of possibility of Machiavellianism. Reading Machiavelli in a Machiavellian manner is no less philosophically problematic than reading modernity from the standpoint of modernity (a practice Zuckert's mentor Leo Strauss would stringently critique): in both cases, we shut ourselves to the very possibility of discovering a world in which what we take for granted is expendable, if not simply false.

The difficulty in question is exacerbated by the fact that Zuckert hardly confronts *philosophical* alternatives to the one she offers, most notably with respect to her reading of the American Founding as a Machiavellian enterprise (in a *liberal* sense of the expression). Beyond a few marginal allusions, *Machiavelli's Politics* offers no account of readings of the American Founding as philosophically antithetical to Machiavelli's secularism.

people or desires (see, e.g., 11, 21, 78, 80, 291, 467, 475). This is not to say that Zuckert does not ultimately privilege a philosophical approach to Machiavelli, who, she argues, inspired by Leo Strauss, was a philosopher, that is, someone who “did not accept any authority but reason and was willing to reason or inquire about all things” (9–11).² Yet, as Zuckert confirms, Machiavelli revolutionized the meaning of philosophy, which he secularized in the sense that he severed it from theological (traditionally, highest) concerns in the act of binding it inexorably to popular or vulgar ones (11, 173, 295). By the same token, Zuckert’s inquiry into Machiavelli ultimately draws us to philosophy, not as one mode of investigation among others, but as the result of the integration of the historical and the rhetorical/literary, in the medium of philosophy narrowly understood (13). Machiavelli’s thought is supposed to come to light through the logical interplay of “things” (historical circumstances) and “words” (rhetorical strategies)—not as their transcendent mean, but as their consummate harmonizing (362).

Machiavelli’s own ethics departs from Aristotle’s classical appeal to virtue as a mean, favoring instead an appeal to virtue as opposite of vice *tout court*, whereby, as Zuckert stresses, “there can be no middle position” (77). Yet Zuckert further argues that Machiavelli preaches self-restraint or moderation in all dealings, both public and private (compare 80–81, 154–55, 280). Does this mean that Machiavelli “returns,” if unwittingly, to the classical notion of virtue as a “middle position”? In effect, what Machiavelli rejects is not a “middle position,” or moderation, but the classical notion of “middle” as transcending (“vertically”) the whole horizon of excesses, or vicious extremes. The middle ceases to be an end in itself *presupposed* by the extremes, in the act of becoming a “balance of powers” instrumental to universal satisfaction or pleasure (15, 78, 268): instead of raising us above all excesses, Machiavelli’s “middle position” would, so to speak, raise all excesses into the realization of the common good. In balancing each other, excesses would serve a good cause, ultimately coinciding with the establishment and preservation of “the rational society” (11). In Hegelian terms, Machiavelli’s virtue consists of the “sublimation” (*Aufheben*) of vice—a sublimation susceptible to being ratified and defended by good laws and good arms (where “good” entails accessibility

² Socrates’s example, among others, tells us that a philosopher as philosopher can indeed accept certain laws as authoritative. Zuckert’s definition of “philosopher” ought therefore to be revised to refer to unwillingness to accept any authority *as an end in itself*, or as incompatible with natural reason. Where we understand reason *as* authority—all the more where it is *the only* acceptable authority—we are already treading in the footsteps of merely one special approach to philosophy, namely, that of the modern Enlightenment, or more specifically, of Machiavelli.

to the plebs: 22, 300–301, 331, 474; on the limits of “law,” including religious law, see, e.g., 98, 141, 143, 265, 474). Any virtue purporting to rise heroically above all vice would be but a mask of vice, rather than a cure against vice. Herein do we find the heart of Machiavelli’s anti-Platonism. The Florentine replaces Socratic heroism (entailing the primacy of love over fear: 14) with a demythologized heroism that uses both good and evil in order to rise beyond both (34, 84, 130, 309, 469). Machiavelli’s own hero, his enlightened “Prince,” is neither a mere *grande*—a conventional nobleman—nor a mere plebeian, but a plebeian “guardian of liberty” who has risen to great heights, integrating knowledge of masters and that of slaves into a master’s self-knowledge (43–44, 132). Having given the sufferance of the plebs (“the wretched of the earth,” we might say: 125, 302) a superlative dignity, Machiavelli’s hero is no ordinary prince, but a prince guided by Machiavelli’s mind; or rather, the hero is Machiavelli himself having gained a seat of authority (43–44, 46).

Having appealed to Strauss’s *Thoughts on Machiavelli* beyond its first chapter (2), Zuckert succeeds in arguing against the widespread view of Machiavelli as a propounder of tyranny, or outright teacher of evil.³ In order to adequately assess the writings—most notably *The Prince*—that have long served as “evidence” for the demonizing of Machiavelli, we should “balance” them against other writings—most notably, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*—specifically aimed at liberating a people from tyranny, rather than at consolidating the authority of a tyrant. If *The Prince* educates the tyrant to tame a people (lest he repress them: 155), the *Discourses* educates the people to tame the prince, or ruling class (85, 460). When the two “educations” are properly combined, they yield the constitution of a “democratic republic” (2, 21), not unlike the American one (460). In both educations, the aim is to find both internal and external balance: on one hand, each “humor” or character—that of those who want to rule and that of those who do not want to be ruled (even as they have not yet risen to desire to rule)—is to reach in “fear” a middle ground between love and hatred of its political counterpart (80, 84–88, 92); on the other hand, the plebs’ fear of the patricians and the patricians’ of the plebs balance each other into the establishment of “the free way of life” or republic (143) embodied in a polity as envisioned, after Machiavelli and via Montesquieu, by America’s Founding Fathers (compare 3, 37, 69, 95, 150, 164, 182, 245, 454, 460, 474). We are supposedly at the dawn of a Realpolitik (15, 37) embracing the very religious establishments that separate

³ Machiavelli’s “democratization” of vice alone stands in the way of all readings of Machiavelli as teacher of tyranny (37).

Machiavelli's times from ancient Rome. If Christian rhetoric (represented notably by a "fox": e.g., 82–83, 90, 390, 397) does not allow the Florentine's world to return to a naive faith in Fortuna (181), it may be nonetheless useful to support a might (represented notably by a "lion": 82, 140–41, 192) by far superior to that of classical antiquity—a might or power that does not limit itself to treading within limits set by nature, but that attempts to conquer nature, to overcome it, if only by turning it against itself, by channeling it, as fuel, into the creation of a new world (11, 17, 24). In sum, Machiavelli uses Christianity (69, 118) not merely to return to antiquity, but to improve upon it (116; on the fraudulent use of religion to satisfy private desires, see especially Zuckert's third chapter on the *Mandragola*: 283–97; on religious fraud as instrumental to the common good, see, e.g., 138–39).

Zuckert does not spell out the manner in which Christianity may be actively beneficial to Machiavelli's project, beyond the boundaries of cunning. The link between Machiavelli and the church is presented as incarnated by Savonarola, whose primary fault seems to have consisted of a lack of political straightforwardness or transparency, typical of most Christians (27–28, 133). Nothing is said of Savonarola's outright rejection of Dante's Renaissance inheritance, as signaled, for example, by the Dominican's incitation of public bonfires in which humanist books and paintings were deemed to be as "vile" as ordinary artifacts catering to feminine vanity.⁴ Be that as it may, Zuckert's Machiavelli emerges roughly as a secular Savonarola, a liberator for whom the otherworldly is a mere pretext for establishing worldly order (28). No more intimate nexus is discerned between Machiavelli and Christian theology. Zuckert does not explore, for instance, the Florentine's debt to the Christian notion of *felix culpa*—where evil is used for the good as a necessary stepping stone—or more generally, to a Christian "liberal morality" that even Nietzsche and Heidegger would fail to abandon.⁵

⁴ Foremost instances of Zuckert's downplaying are (1) her account of Savonarola's flaws, (2) her silence before Machiavelli's rejection of Dante's "Renaissance" (a rejection most vividly displayed in Machiavelli's *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, which Zuckert refers to briefly only once [283] and without any mention of the *Discourse's* anti-Dantean intent), (3) silence before the crisis of both reason and authority (not to speak of the rise of global mercantile despotism), arguably a necessary outcome of the unfolding of Machiavelli's modernity, as examined most notably by Leo Strauss, and (4) philosophical readings of the American Founding as anti-Machiavellian both in letter and in spirit. Thus, while Harry Jaffa is never mentioned, Strauss is never shown, as he could have been, pitting the American Founding against Machiavelli (e.g., in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss states that "the United States of America may be said to be the only country in the world which was founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles" [Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 13]).

⁵ Machiavelli's discernment of love as a mask of fear is not entirely un-Christian, insofar as his

Zuckert's Machiavelli's lesson appears to be *positively* indebted especially to ancient materialism (16, 58–59, 121); otherwise, both the past and the future appear to be incidental to a Machiavellian instrumentalist liberalism that happens to find its closest concrete partner in American constitutionalism. Accordingly, Zuckert denies that Machiavelli could have understood himself as “the founder of modernity,” on the double ground that he did not have a “scientific” understanding of nature (10), and that, as Pierre Manent has argued, Machiavelli could not have foretold modernity (9–10). Whether or not modernity—and its contemporary crisis of identity—unfolded out of a Machiavellian revolution, Machiavelli himself could not be held responsible for the uses to which he may have been put. Thus can Zuckert link Machiavelli to the founding of American republicanism, even assuming that the modern mechanistic reading of nature in terms of scientific “laws,” as well as the whole “history of modernity,” has *unfolded* (perhaps, then, mindlessly or mechanically) out of Machiavellian principles (no less than modern nihilism unfolds, according to Heidegger, out of ancient “Platonism”).

While Zuckert openly addresses a wide variety of modern personalities, from academia to politics, as having responded, whether favorably or unfavorably, to Machiavelli's work, three visually inconspicuous footnote references are most significant: two are to Nietzsche and one is to Heidegger (5–6, 58). Neither German is, however, mentioned in the book's index.⁶ Zuckert's relative silence easily lends itself to being understood as moved by apologetic interest in tying Machiavelli's Prince (superior to traditional *grandi*) to American republicanism, as opposed to, for instance, the *ill repute* of a supermanly race born of Nietzsche's morality of “beyond good and evil.”⁷ On another front, while confirming Machiavelli's pre-Socratic inspiration (10, 16, 75), more

emphasis on a sovereign, if only unfortunate, need to be “not...good” (475) or “bad” (77, 80, 150)—whereby love is sustained in fear—is reminiscent of Christianity's universal terrible mercy (to echo Poe's *The Black Cat*), where eternal judgment, or the threat thereof, consummates divine love of sinners or enemies. Otherwise put, we love either as much as we fear, or as much as we are fearsome. As for a “love beyond all fear,” just as the Virgil of Dante's *Inferno* I, it would be entirely indifferent to (in no manner resentful of) any divine judgment.

⁶ As far as I could tell, Nietzsche and Heidegger are the sole index exclusions. Zuckert's volume is otherwise diligently edited, containing merely occasional minor typos: e.g., 7 (“sensible” for “sensory”), 8 (“populi” for “popoli”), 67 (“astuzia fortunate” for “astuzia fortunata”), 341 (Castracani read as “castrated dog” rather than “dog castrator”), 465 (“esercitato” for “esercizio”), 388 (“Giovannie” for “Giovanni”).

⁷ Machiavelli's anticipation of Nietzsche (and, to some extent, of Heidegger: 58) is tacitly, though equally saliently, evoked where Zuckert stresses Mansfield's partial rhetorical departure from Leo Strauss (12–13). On Machiavelli's move “beyond good and evil,” see further, e.g., 3, 11, 65, 67, 75, 77, 185, 475. On Machiavelli's “prince” as a Nietzschean-like Superman who masters the Fortuna in function of which Nature is to be understood, see further 43–44 and 60 (the will to overcome Nature presupposes a conception of Nature as susceptible to being overcome, in the first place).

or less tacitly, Zuckert invites appreciation of an intimate affinity between Machiavelli and Socratic or Platonic idealism, provided the latter presupposes pre-Socratic “materialism” as Machiavelli’s republican constitutionalism presupposes violence and tyranny, not to speak of empire.⁸ The crucial difference between Plato and Machiavelli would then pertain, not to their goal (and political effect), but to the Florentine’s unprecedented “transparency” in dealing with the material conditions of freedom: unlike his Greek contemplative predecessor, Machiavelli resists being harmonized with Christianity (361).⁹ Zuckert’s work brings Machiavelli’s transparency to bear upon ancient Platonism, seemingly aiming at filling the gap between the Greek and the Italian. Thus, for instance, Zuckert’s Socrates agrees with Machiavelli in “count[ing] religion but a childish toy” (1; compare 141 and 326).

With Machiavelli, it becomes clear that human society is based not on desire, but on a fear grounding all desire (35–36, 46, 138, 147–50, 360, 465). Ironically, it is the primacy of fear over desire (reflected in Machiavelli’s materialistic idealism) that makes of Machiavelli, as opposed to Plato, by far the keenest defender of freedom above honor (24, 58, 79, 128–29, 255): not only does fear engendered by natural threats drive men to live under laws, but fear engendered by rulers engaged in expanding republics saves the demos from “corruption” or loss of self-reliance (129–33, 148–51, 263, with 12–13, 19). Whence the need enduring republics have to maintain an imperialistic impulse alive, whereby a beastly combination of force (“the lion”) and fraud (“the fox”: 390) works hand in hand with respect for laws and care for popular consent, or easily manipulated public opinion (1, 155, 170, 472). Lest a people’s fear of being ruled be eclipsed by a widespread anarchic desire to rule (a desire fostered, e.g., by “redistributive policies” incarnating a tyrannical wish “to make the rich poor” and “the poor rich” [162, 473] as opposed to a genuinely republican duty “to keep the public rich and their citizens poor” [160]), strife between a ruling class and its plebs is to be preserved under the law and for the sake of the common good (160–62). In short, the key to freedom is government-mediated expansionistic competition, strife, or war (157–77, 315, 469), in the absence of which republics would implode, as freedom would turn against

⁸ On the fundamental coincidence of empire and republic, where, e.g., public elections easily serve as masks of private interests, see, e.g., 48–49, 52–53, 56–58, 60, 65, 72, 90, 166–67, 265, 460, 463. On Machiavelli’s anti-imperialist message, see, e.g., 76, 79, 91, 262, and 460.

⁹ Whereas Plato presents Socrates as an apologist for philosophy, Zuckert’s Machiavelli aims at improving, if not altogether perfecting, politics (118 and 363). Incompatibility between Socrates and Machiavelli is thus far from evident. An academic Platonist might thrive in and even celebrate a Machiavellian world.

itself, giving rise to civil wars (451, 468). Zuckert's reading of Machiavelli thus invites the conclusion that republicanism and imperialism (the latter marked by "a truly monarchical or single executive power": 135, after Mansfield; cf. 13) need each other, as the form and matter of a free life (compare 135, 164, 176, and 281–82). More particularly, Zuckert's work invites us to appreciate that the American Founding experiment confirms Machiavelli's enduring relevance as a guide for all those otherwise at risk of mistaking tyranny (financial or otherwise) for the grace of boundless freedom.

Zuckert's general argument strongly suggests that the crisis of late modernity depends upon a misunderstanding or forgetfulness of modernity's Machiavellian inception. Most auspicious would then be a "return to Machiavelli," entailing a defense of political stances that have become a staple for certain contemporary American Republican strands favoring imperialism or expansionism (aimed, as seen, at averting corruption); popular autonomy (especially legal and military, entailing a people's open access to weapons); governmental expedient use of religion (141); and the rejection of redistributive policies as feeding into tyranny. Yet, Zuckert's work further suggests that a defense of Machiavellian politics is not incompatible (if only in academic circles) with a cherishing of Platonism's lesson concerning the superiority of philosophical contemplation with respect to politics: especially since the American Founding, a Machiavellian political scenario is fully compatible with the primacy, otherwise eclipsed by Machiavelli, of the philosopher over the nonphilosopher. Zuckert's reader is thereby justified in asking whether the author ultimately succeeds in transcending a Romantic or "metaphorical" approach to Plato.

Concerning the divide between Machiavelli and Plato, it would be false to state that whereas Machiavelli dares consider evil, Plato blinds himself to evil, taking refuge in a "Platonic love" of Panglossian-like chastity. The key issue is the capacity to learn evil without *using* it.

Attainment of purely theoretical knowledge of evil presupposes a capacity to investigate the foundations of morality; it entails access to principles underlying "good and evil," principles further allowing us to discern, with Plato's Socrates, a good untainted by any evil. For us to tread a Socratic path, as opposed to a Machiavellian one, we would need to recognize, along with Leo Strauss, "eternal ideas" as "absolutely essential."

Machiavelli's own investigation of good and evil is made possible by recourse to a ground of all moral distinctions: Machiavelli is neither

merely a historian, nor merely a historicist (8–9). Yet, as Zuckert indicates, Machiavelli's political knowledge does not presuppose knowledge of the eternal. Indeed, Machiavelli's starting point is an Epicurean material vortex (10, 16–17; Zuckert does not speak of a “vortex,” but simply of “matter in motion”). Yet, Machiavelli departs from Epicurus (296), we might say, by reading him through Plato (359–61). For Machiavelli, matter is, as it were, stable enough to serve as the ultimate foundation of free societies (362–63). In fact, to quote the Strauss from whom Zuckert has “learned a great deal” (118), for Machiavelli knowledge of human or worldly things presupposes knowledge of natural things as “the invariable ‘world’ itself.”¹⁰ Herein do we find the key to Machiavelli's *philosophical* turn to “history” (9, 11, 15). If, as Zuckert argues, “Machiavelli could not possibly have understood himself to be the founder of modernity” (9), Zuckert's work invites nonetheless the conclusion that Machiavelli lays the foundations for the *philosophical* historicism usually associated with names such as Hegel and Heidegger.

¹⁰ Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 18.