

Interpretation

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- 155 Ian Dagg Natural Religion in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws*
- 179 David N. Levy Aristotle's "Reply" to Machiavelli on Morality
- 199 Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo "Deceived by the Glory of Caesar": Humility and Machiavelli's Founder
- 223 Marco Andreacchio **Reviews Essays:**
Mastery of Nature, edited by Svetozar Y. Minkov and Bernhardt L. Trout
- 249 Alex Priou *The Eccentric Core*, edited by Ronna Burger and Patrick Goodin
- 269 David Lewis Schaefer *The Banality of Heidegger* by Jean-Luc Nancy
- 291 Victor Bruno **Book Reviews:**
The Techne of Giving by Timothy C. Campbell
- 297 Jonathan Culp *Orwell Your Orwell* by David Ramsay Steele
- 303 Fred Erdman *Becoming Socrates* by Alex Priou
- 307 David Fott *Roman Political Thought* by Jed W. Atkins
- 313 Steven H. Frankel *The Idol of Our Age* by Daniel J. Mahoney
- 323 Michael Harding *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thrasymachean-Dionysian Socrates* by Angel Jaramillo Torres
- 335 Marjorie Jeffrey *Aristocratic Souls in Democratic Times*, edited by Richard Avramenko and Ethan Alexander-Davey
- 341 Peter Minowitz *The Bleak Political Implications of Socratic Religion* by Shadia B. Drury
- 347 Charles T. Rubin *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child* by Eileen Hunt Botting
- 353 Thomas Schneider *From Oligarchy to Republicanism* by Forrest A. Nabors
- 357 Stephen Sims *The Legitimacy of the Human* by Rémi Brague

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Aristotle's "Reply" to Machiavelli on Morality

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Abstract: Moral virtue is supposed to be its own reward. In chapters 15 and following of *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues forcefully that this principle is not conducive to the happiness of rulers and their subjects (which is to say, of everyone). One must learn to judge by effects and to call virtuous those actions, and only those actions, which are truly rewarding because they promote one's security, prosperity, and honor. This article shows that Aristotle—a primary, though unnamed, adversary of Machiavelli here—was familiar with arguments of this kind and replied to them. The article focuses on the two thinkers' views regarding the relation between the noble and the good, with particular attention to their contrasting presentations of the virtue of liberality.

It is characteristic of well-brought-up persons—those traditionally called ladies and gentlemen—that their attitude toward morality is not mercenary. They believe in doing the decent thing because it is the decent thing to do, rather than because, or when, it pays them to do so. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* expresses this principle by saying that moral virtue is practiced for its own sake, or as he also says, for the sake of the noble, that is, that which is choiceworthy in itself and praiseworthy.¹ Machiavelli, beginning

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¹ For this definition of the noble, see Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* VIII.3 1248b18–20, *Rhetoric* I.9 1366a33–34. In references to works by Aristotle and Machiavelli, the following abbreviations will be used: *NE* = *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Pol.* = *Politics*, *Rhet.* = *Rhetoric*, *EE* = *Eudemian Ethics*, *Met.* =

in chapter 15 of *The Prince*, openly challenges this nonmercenary attitude and by implication the moral philosophy of Aristotle (the most respected moral philosophy of his time). While admitting that moral virtue is universally praised, Machiavelli insists upon the “effectual truth” that a man, and especially a prince, who tries to practice moral virtue scrupulously will come to ruin, defeated by those less scrupulous than he. Hence the Aristotelian moral teaching is incompatible with princely government. Since “prince” in Machiavelli can have the broader meaning of “political leader,”² his argument implies that the Aristotelian teaching is incompatible not only with princely government but with government generally, and hence with the common good of mankind. Machiavelli’s own teaching of moral flexibility, by contrast, advances that good.³

Shocking though it may be, Machiavelli’s argument is not so feeble that one would not care to know how Aristotle might reply to it. Yet scholars have rarely asked this specific question.⁴ The thesis of this article is that Aristotle, in effect, did reply: he was familiar with arguments closely akin to that of Machiavelli and he conceded something to those arguments, while nonetheless finding grounds for presenting moral virtue as a noble end in itself. The article will focus on the two thinkers’ views regarding the relation between the noble and the good, with particular attention to their contrasting presentations of the virtue of liberality in chapter 16 of *The Prince* and book IV, chapter 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵

Metaphysics; P = *Prince*, D = *Discourses on Livy*. References to the “*Ethics*” are to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translations follow, with occasional changes, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); *Aristotle’s Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Translations from other works are my own unless otherwise noted.

² All political regimes are divided into two classes, republics and principalities (P 1), and both classes are governed by “princes” (see, e.g., D I.12 [“the princes of a republic, or of a kingdom”], D I.20) who must often behave in similar ways. For example, the prince of a principality is advised that although practicing the moral virtues consistently is harmful, appearing to practice them is useful (P 18); the princes of the Roman Republic, praised by Machiavelli, are shown to have acted according to this rule (see, e.g., D I.51 on the Roman senate’s “liberality”).

³ His teaching is “useful to whoever understands it” (P 15) and will bring a “common benefit to everyone” (D I Preface, beg.).

⁴ An exception is Robert C. Bartlett, “The ‘Realism’ of Classical Political Science,” *American Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 2 (1994): 381–402 (which focuses, however, on Aristotle’s *Politics* rather than his *Ethics*).

⁵ This article does not offer a comprehensive interpretation of these two chapters, but only of those parts most relevant to the subject at hand.

IS ARISTOTLE A TARGET OF MACHIAVELLI?

When at the beginning of *Prince* 15 Machiavelli announces his departure from traditional moral teachings, he does not name his opponents but refers vaguely to "many" who "have written" on moral matters and who "have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth." The assumption that among these "many" Aristotle holds a leading place is by no means universally shared. Except for those influenced directly or indirectly by Leo Strauss, modern scholars have generally regarded Machiavelli's critique as directed primarily against certain Renaissance and classical Roman authors, especially Cicero.⁶ There are indeed grounds for supposing that certain arguments in *The Prince* are directed against Cicero.⁷ Yet in a passage in another work of Machiavelli that strikingly parallels his language in *Prince* 15 about authors of imaginary republics, he refers not to Cicero but to "Aristotle, Plato and many others."⁸ If indeed Machiavelli

⁶ See, for example, the following influential discussions: Allan H. Gilbert, *Machiavelli's "Prince" and Its Forerunners* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1938; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968); Felix Gilbert, "The Humanist Concept of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli," *Journal of Modern History* 11, no. 4 (1939): 449–83; Marcia L. Colish, "Cicero's *De Officiis* and Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 4 (1978): 80–93; Quentin Skinner, introduction to *The Prince*, by Machiavelli, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), xv–xxii; and Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40–53. Strauss asserts that in *The Prince* Machiavelli "rewrites, as it were, Aristotle's *Ethics*" (Leo Strauss, *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], 214; cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* [Glencoe: Free Press, 1958; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 237). Those influenced by Strauss include Clifford Orwin, "Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity," *American Political Science Review* 72, no. 4 (1978): 1217–28; Richard H. Cox, "Aristotle and Machiavelli on Liberty," in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Stoffer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 125–47; and Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11–24. Bernard Guillemain, "Machiavel, lecteur d'Aristote," in *Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance: XVIe Colloque International de Tours*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin (Paris: Vrin, 1976), 168–69, may also belong to this group. Michael Hornqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166–81, 205–27, and John T. Scott, *The Routledge Guidebook to Machiavelli's "The Prince"* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 148–66, build partly upon Orwin, "Unchristian Charity." Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's "Prince": A New Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 185, 188, 201, and Giovanni Giorgini, "Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited," in *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, ed. David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 58–86, like Strauss, bring *The Prince* into relation with Aristotle's *Ethics*; unlike him they view Machiavelli's teaching as being in fundamental harmony with that of Aristotle.

⁷ Cf. the argument in *P* 17 that it is better to be feared than loved with Cicero, *De officiis* II.7.23ff.; in *P* 18, cf. the remark about the two kinds of combat, one with laws and the other with force, with *De officiis* I.11.34 and cf. the advice to imitate the fox and the lion with *De officiis* I.13.41.

⁸ Men have so esteemed the glory of making republics and kingdoms, says Machiavelli, that "when they have not been able to make a republic in action, they have done it in writing, as have Aristotle, Plato, and many others" (Niccolò Machiavelli, "Discourse on Florentine Affairs," a.k.a. "A Discourse on Remodeling the Government of Florence," in *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Mario Martelli [Florence: Sansoni, 1971; repr., Milan: Fabbri, Bompiani et al., 1993], 30b).

regarded Aristotle (along with Plato) as a weightier adversary than Cicero, this would not be surprising. In Machiavelli's time and place, although Cicero was certainly very influential, Aristotelianism was still "the predominant philosophical tradition"⁹ and the *Nicomachean Ethics* "remained the university textbook for moral education, was passionately studied in humanist circles and schools, and was repeatedly translated, printed, and commented [upon]."¹⁰ Moreover, during the fifteenth century (the century in which Machiavelli came of age), "doubtless the most active center in Italy for the study of Aristotle's *Ethics*" was Machiavelli's own city of Florence. There the *Ethics* was studied in the university, by leading humanists outside the university, by members of religious orders, and by "a broad public that avidly read Aristotle's *Ethics* either in Latin or in the vernacular."¹¹ That public evidently included Machiavelli's father, who purchased a Latin translation and commentary.¹² The *Ethics*, then, was both a fundamental text in Machiavelli's world and readily available to him.

Given this background one may well regard as a hint, rather than a mere coincidence, the fact that in *Prince* 15 Machiavelli lists eleven pairs of commonly accepted virtues and vices—eleven being, as Dante and Thomas Aquinas had noted, the number of moral virtues treated in the *Ethics*.¹³ It

⁹ Luca Bianchi, "Continuity and Change in the Aristotelian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 49, 62–63; Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 33; David A. Lines, *Aristotle's "Ethics" in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 173, and introduction to *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics*, ed. David A. Lines and Sabrina Ebbersmeyer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 7–8.

¹⁰ Luca Bianchi, "Renaissance Readings of the *Nicomachean Ethics*," in Lines and Ebbersmeyer, *Rethinking Virtue*, 135; see also David A. Lines, "Humanistic and Scholastic Ethics," in Hankins, *Cambridge Companion*, 305, and David A. Lines, "Aristotle's *Ethics* in the Renaissance," in *The Reception of Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Jon Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 173–74, 192–93. Note that Petrarch, in his famous attack in the fourteenth century on the blind worshippers of Aristotle, did not object to the content of Aristotle's moral philosophy: Aristotle "teaches what virtue is, I do not deny that" (*docet ille, non infitior, quid est virtus*). He merely complained that Aristotle's rhetoric is too cool, that he does not make us love virtue as do Cicero, Seneca, and other Latin writers. See Petrarch, "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others," trans. Hans Nachod, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 103–4.

¹¹ Lines, *Aristotle's "Ethics" in the Italian Renaissance*, 185; see also Bianchi, "Renaissance Readings," 143.

¹² The elder Machiavelli recorded his purchase of a commentary (Bernardo Machiavelli, *Libro di Ricordi*, ed. Cesare Olshki [Florence: Le Monnier, 1954], 141–42); this commentary was printed together with a Latin translation of the *Ethics* (Lines, *Aristotle's "Ethics" in the Italian Renaissance*, 219, 488). The commentary was by Donato Acciaiuoli, the translation by John Argyropoulos; both men are mentioned in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories* (VIII.14, VII.6) as being learned in Greek.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 60, a. 5, c. (cited by Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 338n139); Dante, *Convivio* IV.17. For compelling evidence that Machiavelli made use of numerology,

is true that whereas Aristotle presents moral virtue as a mean between two vices, Machiavelli lists each virtue in opposition to a single vice. For example, whereas for Aristotle liberality is the virtuous mean between stinginess and prodigality, on Machiavelli's list it is merely the opposite of stinginess. Yet in the discussion of liberality in the following chapter, we encounter, in effect, not only stinginess but also prodigality (*suntuosità*, "lavish spending"); Machiavelli thus seems to be familiar with the Aristotelian doctrine.¹⁴ What he argues, as we shall see, is that in practice, the Aristotelian distinction between liberality and prodigality breaks down, so that the real choice is between prodigality and stinginess: the virtuous mean is unattainable.¹⁵ Machiavelli's initial listing of virtues and vices in pairs, rather than in sets of three, would then signify not a lack of attention to Aristotle but a conscious rejection of him. That he does not name Aristotle here but resorts to hints may be explained by the fact that, as he says at the beginning of chapter 15, he fears he may be held presumptuous. Furthermore, an explicit attack on Aristotle's moral philosophy would needlessly offend the prejudices of many readers who might otherwise be open to Machiavelli's influence.¹⁶

Thus, while Machiavelli's critique of traditional morality is no doubt directed against many targets, including Cicero and the Renaissance humanists, not to mention the Bible and Christianity, there is reason to believe that a primary target is Aristotle's *Ethics*.¹⁷

see Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 330n6.

¹⁴ Benner, *Machiavelli's "Prince"*, 188. Furthermore, as Orwin points out ("Unchristian Charity," 1220n16), Machiavelli's description of the moral virtues in *P* 15 as the qualities that bring men "praise or blame" recalls Aristotle's similar description in *NE* II.5 1106a1–2.

¹⁵ Machiavelli eventually allows for a third option, a calculated liberality funded by foreign conquest; but this sort of liberality cannot be said to constitute an Aristotelian mean, in part because it is not practiced for the sake of the noble.

¹⁶ Note in this regard that Machiavelli never explicitly criticizes the doctrines of Cicero, but only his political actions (cf. *D* I.4 and I.52; in *The Prince*, Cicero is never named). As to the parallel passage in "Discourse on Florentine Affairs" (see note 8 above), there Machiavelli can safely name Aristotle and Plato because he is not criticizing but, if anything, praising them. Consider also the following statement by Descartes (in a private letter): "I hope that readers will gradually accustom themselves to my principles, and recognize their truth, before noticing that they destroy those of Aristotle" (letter to Mersenne, Jan. 28, 1641, in *Oeuvres*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 3 [Paris: Cerf, 1899], 297–98).

¹⁷ This article assumes that Machiavelli's critique of Aristotle may be treated separately, at least to begin with, from his critique of Christianity (cf. the following note). Though Machiavelli's contemporaries and predecessors were in the habit of blending the doctrines of Aristotle and other classical authors with those of Christianity, I see no reason to doubt that Machiavelli was as capable as we are of distinguishing between the original Aristotle and the Christianized one. He must have known that Aristotle was chief among "those philosophers" who held the unchristian view that the world is eternal (*D* II.5 beg.). This is not to deny that Machiavelli also discerned a partial kinship between Aristotle and Christianity (consider *D* II.2 on the Christian glorification of "humble and contemplative men")

MACHIAVELLI ON LIBERALITY

Machiavelli argues in chapter 15 of *The Prince* that moral virtue, although praised by everyone, is (as one would say today) unrealistic. Those who insist on always behaving virtuously—the gentlemen—will be beaten by those who will do whatever is necessary to win. Winning requires deviating sometimes from moral virtue or goodness: one must know how and when to be “not good.” Necessity or expediency, not nobility, must be one’s guide. Goodness and nongoodness, that is, the moral virtues and vices, must be “used” or “not used” as necessity dictates. In fact, strictly speaking, those qualities, and only those qualities, that lead to one’s “security and well-being” deserve to be called virtues, even if they have traditionally been called vices. First on Machiavelli’s list is liberality. Does this alleged virtue promote a prince’s security and well-being?

Liberality is not only the first virtue on Machiavelli’s list, it is also the most recognizably Aristotelian one.¹⁸ Aristotle himself, in the *Ethics*, began with the virtues of courage and moderation. But those virtues Machiavelli wishes to retain, though not quite in their Aristotelian meaning (for they are no longer to be practiced for their own sake): a certain kind of courage or daring is plainly a part of Machiavellian virtue,¹⁹ and a prince is well-advised to practice a kind of moderation or self-restraint as regards his subjects’ property and women (*P* 17).²⁰ As for justice, Machiavelli has the delicacy to omit it from his list altogether.²¹ But liberality is a virtue that Machiavelli can criticize openly without causing undue scandal, and that men can learn to give up without much anguish,²² unaware that by accepting Machiavelli’s argument they are giving up not merely liberality but the very basis of Aristotelian morality, as we shall see.

more than “active ones”).

¹⁸ This ordering may indicate that Machiavelli regards Aristotle as his primary or most estimable antagonist. After discussing liberality, Machiavelli “descend[s] [*scendendo*] to the other qualities” (*P* 17 beg.). Orwin (“Unchristian Charity,” 1222) remarks of the transition from *Prince* 16 to 17 that in “passing from liberality to *pietà*, we pass from Aristotle to Christianity.”

¹⁹ Consider “the virtue of Agathocles in entering into and escaping from dangers” (*P* 8).

²⁰ Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli’s Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 78n65.

²¹ I cannot discuss here Machiavelli’s implied critique of Aristotle’s view of justice, a critique that makes possible Machiavelli’s understanding of liberality as spending other people’s money (see below). See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 239ff.

²² See Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, chaps. 1–2.

Let us glance first at Aristotle's treatment of this virtue (*NE* IV.1). Liberality is the moral virtue concerned with using money (or material goods). The proper use of money lies in spending or giving it. The liberal man will then be he who gives, and who gives correctly, that is, not thoughtlessly or extravagantly, but to the right persons, in the right amounts, and at the right times. He will give because it is noble to do so; one who gives for a different reason is not liberal (*NE* IV.1 1120a27–29). For genuine moral virtue is practiced for its own sake, that is, for the sake of the noble (or fine or beautiful [*tò kalón*]; *NE* II.4 1105a28–32, III.7 1115b11–13, VI.5 1140b6–7, X.6 1176b6–9, *EE* VIII.3 1248b34–36). (If it were practiced for the sake of some other end, such as reputation or gain, it would be a mere instrument that one could at any moment exchange for a more effective one.) The liberal man will give with pleasure, for he takes more pleasure in performing a noble action than in possessing money. Since he does not honor money, he will not be tempted to take or earn it from improper sources; he will take it only from proper sources, “for example, from his own possessions” (*NE* IV.1 1120a34–1120b1), and he will do so in order that he may give. Like other moral virtues, liberality is a mean between a vice of excess and a vice of deficiency—in this case, between prodigality, the vice of giving too much, and stinginess, that of giving too little. Prodigality is self-destructive, for the prodigal man soon runs out of money; yet this vice is far less bad than stinginess, for prodigality wants only moderation in order to become liberality, whereas stinginess is generally incurable. Indeed, liberality, Aristotle indicates, is not precisely in the middle between the two vices, but tends in the direction of the excess, that is, of prodigality: “it very much belongs to the liberal man also to *exceed* in giving” (*NE* IV.1 1120b4–5, emphasis added; cf. II.8 1108b30–32).

Aristotle's rather unobtrusive observation regarding liberality's tendency toward prodigality supplies Machiavelli with an opening which he will exploit to the utmost.²³ He begins his critique (*P* 16) by distinguishing between the liberality that is practiced, or as he prefers to say, “used,” for the sake of being reputed liberal and that which is “used virtuously and as it ought to be used,” that is, without any ulterior motive. The latter kind of liberality is, of course, the one endorsed by gentlemen and by Aristotle. To this liberality “used virtuously” Machiavelli objects that “it will not be recognized and you will not avoid the infamy of its contrary.” The sense of this compressed objection seems to be as follows. It is noble to give to worthy persons, who are few;²⁴ hence the

²³ Orwin, “Unchristian Charity,” 1220–21.

²⁴ According to Aristotle, most men are bad (*NE* X.9 1179b10–16, *Rhet.* II.4 1382b4).

many, who do not regard themselves as unworthy, will call you stingy. Is the noble so intrinsically satisfying that for its sake you are willing to be reputed base? In other words, do you really practice moral virtue for its own sake? The answer to these questions is no. “And so if one wants to maintain a name for liberality among men” (and it is this that one really wants), “it is necessary not to leave out any quality of lavish spending”; that is, one must become prodigal. Liberality necessarily transforms itself into prodigality: prodigality, one may say, is the “effectual truth” of liberality.²⁵ And prodigality turns out to be worse, not better, than stinginess, for through prodigality the prince quickly consumes his resources, and to obtain more he must burden the people with extraordinary taxes, which makes him hated. But his security depends on his not being hated by the people (*P* 9). Liberality, as the cause of these damaging effects, proves to be not a virtue but a vice.²⁶

If the prince accepts the traditional opinion that liberality is a virtue and therefore seeks to be praised for possessing it, he puts himself on the road to ruin. But if, instead, he rejects that opinion, and deliberately practices stinginess, his subjects will eventually call his stinginess thrift, and his thrift liberality. For they will see that he has the resources to administer and defend his state without excessive taxation, so that, in Machiavelli’s memorable expression, “he comes to use liberality with all those from whom he does not take, who are infinite, and stinginess with all those to whom he does not give, who are few.”²⁷ Thus liberality, the virtue of giving, is redefined as the virtue of not taking,²⁸ and the prince learns how to obtain what he wanted all along without being fully aware of it: not the noble, but honor and security.²⁹

²⁵ Leo Paul de Alvarez, *The Machiavellian Enterprise: A Commentary on “The Prince”* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 79.

²⁶ Note that unlike Aristotle, Machiavelli presents liberality primarily in its relation to ruling; he politicizes this and other virtues.

²⁷ Moreover, the few are not so deserving as they appear: beneath their pretense of moral virtue lies the desire to oppress (*P* 9; *D* I.3, 5). Miguel Vatter (*Machiavelli’s “The Prince”* [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 92–93), among others, stresses the antiaristocratic, prodemocratic implications of Machiavelli’s critique of liberality, which in Vatter’s view are so profound as to amount to a Nietzschean “revaluation of all values.”

²⁸ Orwin, “Unchristian Charity,” 1221.

²⁹ Benner (*Machiavelli’s “Prince,”* 185–89) claims, contrary to the interpretation offered here, that Machiavelli in fact endorses liberality as traditionally understood, this endorsement being implied in the phrase “if [liberality] is used virtuously and as it ought to be used.” Machiavelli, on her account, warns not against liberality but against yielding to the popular misconception which equates liberality with prodigality; he merely exhorts the prince to fiscal responsibility. Similarly, Skinner (“Machiavelli and the Misunderstanding of Princely *Virtù*,” in Johnston, *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, 148–49) argues that Machiavelli criticizes not so much liberality as “seeming liberality” or liberality “as it is commonly but corruptly understood” (i.e., prodigality). I believe that Machiavelli denies the

Of course, giving is not always harmful. Everything depends on why one gives and from whom one takes. A private man who aspires to be prince, Machiavelli allows, must use liberality in order to win friends and popular support, as Julius Caesar did. (Plutarch relates that Caesar as a rising politician borrowed large sums in order to pay for lavish popular entertainments; later he persuaded Crassus to pay off his creditors.)³⁰ Again, a general who conquers and pillages foreign lands must use liberality with his soldiers, for otherwise they would not follow him; nor is there any harm in his doing so, since he spends only what belongs to others, not to himself or his subjects.³¹ While Aristotle's liberal man spends his own money and aims at nobility, Machiavelli's spends that of other people and aims at expediency: which of the two is more likely to prosper?

Machiavelli's argument concerning moral virtue in general, and liberality in particular, may be said to amount to this. Moral virtue as traditionally understood is supposed to be practiced for the sake of the noble. But there is a conflict between the noble and the good ("security and well-being"). The more clearly this conflict is understood, the more the noble loses its charm. The moral virtues must therefore be reconceived. They must no longer be the stars above us, the objects of our wonder and aspiration (*NE* V.1 1129b25–29), but must become the earthly instruments of our earthly ends, instruments to be used, or not used, "according to necessity" (*P* 15).

ARISTOTLE'S REPLY

Machiavelli claims to start, unlike his predecessors, from "the effectual truth of the thing" rather than "the imagination of it" (*P* 15). This claim suggests that Aristotle, among others, was (as we say today) idealistic or naive. Yet Aristotle can hardly have been naively unaware of the kinds of objections to

"effectual truth" of the distinction drawn by Benner and Skinner: in practice, princes who are serious about being liberal become prodigal. Machiavelli begins, indeed, by nodding respectfully to liberality "used virtuously," but immediately thereafter he lets us see into what great dangers it leads us. The rest of the chapter he devotes entirely to questions of expediency; he makes no further reference to liberality "used virtuously," thus inducing us to forget about it.

³⁰ Plutarch, "Life of Julius Caesar," 4–5, 11.

³¹ Orwin ("Unchristian Charity," 1222), Hornqvist (*Machiavelli and Empire*, 174–81), and Scott (*Routledge Guidebook*, 165–66) argue, in somewhat different ways, that this passage is the key to understanding *P* 16: not so much domestic thrift as foreign rapacity proves to be the solution to the problem of how to be liberal without consuming one's resources. This thesis is plausible, although I do not share Hornqvist's opinions that chapter 16 is incoherent without this passage and that the conquering general's largesse is Machiavelli's version of the Aristotelian virtue of magnificence (the virtue regarding large and splendid civic expenditures, *NE* IV.2), which I would locate rather at the end of *P* 21.

moral virtue raised by Machiavelli.³² Similar objections had been powerfully expressed by Thrasymachus, as well as by Glaucon and Adeimantus, in Plato's *Republic* (343c–344c, 357a–367e5). One need not portray Machiavelli as merely a modern version of Thrasymachus in order to note the kinship between the argument in *Prince* 15 that the morally scrupulous man will be ruined by those who are not scrupulous and Thrasymachus's argument that the just man will be outdone by the unjust one.³³ It is reasonable to assume that Aristotle, student of Plato and reader of the *Republic* (see *Pol.* II.1–5), gave Thrasymachus's argument due consideration.³⁴ And as will appear shortly, Aristotle did not wholly reject the Thrasymachean-Machiavellian view regarding the relation between the noble (or morally virtuous) and the good.

By “the good” I mean all the things that are either good in themselves or are required or useful for obtaining the things good in themselves. For Aristotle, the most important good, the core of happiness, is “activity of soul in accord with virtue” (*NE* I.7 1098a16–17, I.8 1098b12–16). But moral virtue, at any rate, requires for its full employment not only life and health, but also, for example, wealth (*NE* I.8 1099a31–1099b7, I.9–10 1100a4–14). The good, for Aristotle, also includes pleasure, or certain kinds of pleasure (*NE* VII.12–14, X.1–5).

It might be argued that the relation between the noble and the good is one of perfect harmony. So argues Cicero in the *De officiis*. There can never be a conflict between the noble (*honestum*) and the useful (a term which for him includes all good things), for everything noble is useful, and nothing is useful that is not noble. Cicero attributes this position to the Stoics and distinguishes it from that of the Peripatetics (i.e., Aristotelians) and others who, he says, hold that there can be something noble that is not useful and vice versa. As he puts it in the *De finibus*, Aristotle held that health, strength, riches, glory, and many other things are good but not noble (which could suggest that giving up these things may be noble but not good).³⁵ Cicero's view

³² Machiavelli himself will later concede that the ancient writers taught covertly some of the same effectual truths which he teaches openly. See *P* 17 (what Virgil said through the mouth of Dido) and 18 (the covert meaning of the ancient myth about Chiron's training of princes).

³³ Cf. Scott, *Routledge Guidebook*, 152–53. On the limits of the parallel between Thrasymachus and Machiavelli, see Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 292, and Gennaro Sasso's introduction to *Il Principe e Altri Scritti*, by Niccolò Machiavelli (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1963), xxvii–xxxviii.

³⁴ At *NE* V.1 1130a3–4, Aristotle seems to quote Thrasymachus's characterization of justice as “some-one else's good” (*allotriou agathon*; cf. *Republic* 343c3).

³⁵ *De officiis* III.4.20, III.8.35; *De finibus* IV.18.48–49. In the first passage cited from the *De officiis*, Cicero indicates that in that work he follows the Stoic position because it is more splendid. The *De officiis* is a popular work, adapted to common opinion and therefore diverging at times from what is strictly true (II.10.35). In book IV of the *De finibus*, a more philosophical work, Cicero vigorously

of Aristotle's position is borne out by the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see also *Rhet.* III.16 1417a26–27). Toward the beginning of that work, Aristotle, following certain respectable opinions, maintains that the practice of moral virtue is not only noble but also (for the truly virtuous person) pleasant, and therefore conducive to happiness, since happiness is generally held to involve pleasure. Virtuous actions are therefore "good as well as noble" (*NE* I.8, quotation at 1099a22). But later, in his treatment of the virtue of courage, he is compelled to qualify this claim. Courageously to endure wounds and death is noble, but it is not simply pleasant. To bodily pain is added a great pain of the mind, the painful awareness that in losing one's life one is being "deprived of the greatest goods" (*NE* III.9 1117a32–b16).

In Aristotle's treatment of liberality, we find further indications that the noble and the good do not simply coincide. The liberal man, in order to be liberal, needs money. But since he does not honor money—money is not something serious in itself—he is reluctant to take trouble to earn it. It is not easy to see, therefore, how he will have much money to give away unless he inherits it. (But how did his family get the money originally?)³⁶ Nor is it easy to see how he will avoid becoming gradually impoverished. It is true that he will not be careless with his money, conscious that without it he will no longer be able to be liberal. Nonetheless, "it very much belongs to the liberal man also to exceed in giving, such that there is little left for himself, for it is typical of a liberal man not to look out for himself." Liberality depends on a certain noble forgetfulness and even ignorance of one's material needs: it is partly because he has never experienced such need that one who inherited his wealth is more likely to be liberal than one who earned it (*NE* IV.1 1120b2–6, 11–13).³⁷

criticizes the Stoic position that the noble and the good are identical (see esp. IV.16.44ff.). Cf. Douglas Kries, "On the Intention of Cicero's *De Officiis*," *Review of Politics* 65, no. 4 (2003): 375–93.

³⁶ "Is Aristotle suggesting that the virtue of later generations depends on the vice of previous ones?" asks Ann Ward in *Contemplating Friendship in Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 37. Are the goods required for noble action originally secured by ignoble means?

³⁷ Another element of noble unreasonableness in liberality, as Ann Ward points out, is that the liberal man wants only to give and not to receive benefits (*NE* IV.1 1120a33–34), which implies a desire for superiority or even domination over others (cf. n. 27 above), a desire in tension with the spirit of equality that characterizes both a healthy political life (*Pol.* IV.11 1295b25–26) and the best kind of friendship (*NE* VIII.5 1157b34–37). While I agree with Ward that Aristotle quietly draws attention to this and other problematic aspects of liberality, I believe she goes too far in arguing that the members of the "middling element" that is the anchor of Aristotle's best practicable regime in the *Politics* (IV.11) will likely be money-makers rather than persons of inherited wealth, and will therefore not practice liberality: nothing prevents them from being liberal persons of moderate inherited wealth (cf. the very favorable view of liberality in *Pol.* II.5 1263b5–14). Unlike Machiavelli, Aristotle is willing to live with certain tensions; his reserve is a sign of this fact. See Ann Ward, "Generosity and Inequality in Aristotle's Ethics," *Polis* 28, no. 2 (2011): 269–73 and *Contemplating Friendship*, 36–38.

Insofar as the noble diverges from the good, one may be inclined to understand the noble as a form of self-sacrifice or altruism. But with the possible exception of justice (*NE* V.1 1130a3–4), the moral virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* cannot be understood in this way. Consider the paradox in Aristotle's treatment of courage. Although he designates courage in war as the primary form of this virtue—for war involves the noblest danger—he does not say that the courageous man acts for the sake of his city or fatherland. Rather, he acts “for the sake of the noble, for this is the end of virtue” (*NE* III.6 1115a24–32, III.7 1115b12–13). If one were to ask why the noblest danger is that found in war, part of the answer would doubtless be that there the welfare of one's city is at stake (cf. *NE* I.2 1094b7–10, *Pol.* VII.15 1334a21–22). But Aristotle declines to present courage as subservient to the city's welfare, which he does not even mention here. He indeed mentions the honors accorded to courage by cities and monarchs, but he connects those honors to the nobility (not the utility) of courage (*NE* III.6 1115a28–32). The courageous man, if he dies, dies not for his country per se but for the noble (cf. *NE* IX.8 1169a17–26).³⁸ The case of liberality is analogous. The liberal man, although he benefits others by his gifts, does not give for the sake of benefiting others per se but rather because benefiting others is noble (*NE* IV.1 1120a21–25). Liberality, no more than courage, is to be understood primarily as a form of altruism.³⁹ For “a human being, we say, is free who exists for his own sake and not for the sake of another” (*Met.* A.2 982b25–26). No wonder that Aristotle's morality has been blamed for its “self-absorption.”⁴⁰ But by proceeding otherwise, he would make the higher (i.e., virtue) subordinate to the lower (i.e., material welfare), and he would weaken the link between virtue and happiness (*NE* I.7).

³⁸ This reading owes much to a transcript of Leo Strauss's seminar on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1963 (7th meeting, May 2), which has influenced my understanding of the *Ethics* in numerous ways. (An edited transcript is expected to be published by the Leo Strauss Center.) See also Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 27; Susan D. Collins, *Aristotle and the Rediscovery of Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 52–58; Bartlett and Collins, “Interpretive Essay,” in *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, 256–58; Ward, *Contemplating Friendship*, 34–36.

³⁹ Grant says: “In Aristotle's whole account we do not find a word about benevolence or love to others as prompting acts of liberality. We find no other motive but the ‘splendour’ (καλόν) of the acts themselves.” This claim is contested by Gauthier and Jolif who maintain that liberality is motivated not only by the splendor or nobility of the act itself, but also by friendship. But a careful reading of the passages they cite seems to show merely that giving to friends is noble, not that friendship per se is a motive for liberality. (Friendship and love may well motivate a kind of giving that is not, strictly speaking, liberality.) See Alexander Grant, ed., *The Ethics of Aristotle*, 4th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1885), 60; René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, part 1 (Louvain-La-Neuve: Peeters, 2002), 255.

⁴⁰ David Ross, *Aristotle* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 215.

If acting nobly cannot be understood, primarily, as doing good to others, it must be understood as a good for oneself, and it is so understood by the man of moral virtue (*NE* IX.8, esp. 1169a26–29). Yet we have seen that, in fact, the noble and one's own good do not simply or always coincide. Faced with this contradiction, we must take a broader view of the noble, no longer limiting ourselves to its moral dimension.⁴¹

Broadly speaking, the noble may be defined as that which is distinct from, and ranks higher than, the necessary and useful. It is that which is choiceworthy for its own sake and not for the sake of something else; it is the end for which everything else is a means. "Of matters involving action some are directed toward necessary and useful things, others toward noble things," and the former must be pursued for the sake of the latter. Thus war must be pursued for the sake of peace, and occupation (or business) for the sake of leisure (*Pol.* VII.14 1333a30–36; cf. *NE* IV.1 1120b1, VIII.1 1155a28–29, IX.11 1171a24–26, X.7 1177b4–6; *Rhet.* I.9 1166a33–34). Certain activities of peace and leisure, especially certain activities of the mind, prove to be the primary locus of the noble. Since these are the only activities pursued wholly for their own sake, they are the only truly free activities (*Met.* A.2 982b25–28).

The free man, the liberal man in the broad sense,⁴² is the liberally educated man, he who is educated with a view, above all, to the noble use of leisure. "For [the natural desirability of a noble leisure] is the beginning point [or principle] of everything" (*Pol.* VIII.2–3 1337b4–35). The noble use of leisure is its use in accordance with the better part of the human soul, which is the reasoning part. It is this part, rightly directed, which is capable of the most excellent virtue and affords the purest and most liberal pleasures—in the best case, the pleasures of contemplation or philosophy (*Pol.* VII.14 1333a16–24, *NE* X.6 1176b19–21, X.7 1177a12–18, 25–26). The philosopher desires not to display his superiority to money by giving it away, but rather to make money serve the noblest end, namely, a life devoted to contemplating the truth (*EE* VIII.3 1249b16–19). Qua philosopher (rather than qua member of society), he is not liberal in the narrow sense, for he does not need to be in

⁴¹ For a thoughtful account of the noble (fine/beautiful) in Aristotle which treats a number of important points not mentioned here, see Gabriel Richardson Lear, "Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine," in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics,"* ed. Richard Kraut (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 116–36. Lear's account differs from mine in that she does not present moral nobility as a reflection of intellectual nobility. See also C. D. C. Reeve, *Action, Contemplation, and Happiness: An Essay on Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 122.

⁴² In Greek, as in English (or rather, Latin), the word "liberal" (*eleutheros*) derives from the word for free (*eleutheros*) and means, most broadly, that which befits a free man.

order to accomplish his end; similar statements will apply to his disposition toward courage and the other moral virtues (*NE* X.8 1178a28–b7).⁴³ In short, on the plane of philosophic activity the tension between the noble and the good disappears.

In the light of this activity, we learn in the tenth and final book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, moral actions appear constrained and un leisured; they prove to aim at something beyond themselves (e.g., peace and leisure) rather than being choiceworthy for their own sake (*NE* X.7 1177b4–18).⁴⁴ Yet in a way this activity also vindicates moral nobility, by rendering it more intelligible. In hindsight, the moral virtues as presented in books III–V partly resemble and point to the nobility of contemplation, without necessarily becoming instrumental to it.⁴⁵ Courage and liberality are noble at least partly because they are a demonstration of freedom, if only of a “freedom from”: freedom from slavish attachment to the necessary and useful things (life and money). That is, these virtues flow at least partly from the awareness that comfortable self-preservation cannot be the ultimate end of a serious human being—the same awareness which, when thought through, points toward the conclusions of book X. The great-souled man prefers to possess things that are noble (or beautiful) and unprofitable rather than those that are profitable and beneficial, for the former are more self-sufficient; the most perfect self-sufficiency will prove to be that found in contemplation (*NE* IV.3 1125a11–12, X.7 1177a27–b4).⁴⁶ An especially striking example is that of magnificence (the virtue concerned with spending great amounts of money): the magnificent

⁴³ Whether happiness for Aristotle consists exclusively or predominantly in contemplation (as seems to be asserted in *NE* X.8 1178b27–32), or whether he held a more “inclusive” view according to which happiness consists in contemplation, the exercise of moral virtue, and other goods (as some believe is implied in *NE* I.7), is a much-debated question. For an introduction to the debate and the relevant literature, see David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21–25, 32.

⁴⁴ That liberality, for example, aims at something beyond its own nobility, or that its nobility is inseparable from its utility to the recipient, is already implied in *NE* IV.1 1121b3–6.

⁴⁵ See Aristide Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's "Ethics"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 105–10; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 142, and *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14. For an argument that the moral virtues in the *NE* should be understood as instrumental to the exercise of practical or theoretical reasoning, see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 335–45; cf. Pierre Destrée, “Education, Leisure, and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's "Politics,"* ed. Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 315–16. For an account of liberality, in particular, that emphasizes rather heavily though not exclusively its instrumental aspects, see Judith Swanson, “Aristotle on Liberality: Its Relation to Justice and Its Public and Private Practice,” *Polity* 27, no. 1 (1994): 7–9.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 85–87.

man "resembles a knower, since he is able to contemplate [*theōrēsai*] what is fitting and to spend great amounts in a suitable way" (*NE* IV.2 1122a34–35).⁴⁷ As resemblances of what is highest, the moral virtues may be said to retain their nobility, in spite or because of the argument for the superiority of contemplation (*NE* X.7–8).

Aristotle thus brings about a practical alliance between philosophers and gentlemen.⁴⁸ Especially in the early and middle books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he supplies the gentlemen with an unforgettable portrait of themselves as they are or aspire to be, one that surpasses in clarity, comprehensiveness, and accessibility what they can find in other sources. And by indicating the harmonies between moral and contemplative virtue, he provides a certain rational support for their moral convictions. All this disposes the gentlemen to look up to philosophy. Surely they, who admire things that are noble (beautiful) and useless, are more likely to befriend philosophy than are the many, who admire mainly wealth and power and in whose eyes the philosopher, who cares little for such things, is strange (*NE* X.8 1179a13–16).⁴⁹

Of course, an alliance between philosophers and gentlemen implies that, as we have already seen, the two groups are not the same. The great-souled man, who is a perfect gentleman and who justly esteems himself highly, looks down on other men and indeed on all things: "nothing is great to him" and consequently he is "not given to wonder"; but philosophy begins in wonder. Another consequence of his lofty contempt is that he is idle except when there is some great deed to be done, whereas a philosopher is as continually active as a human being can be (*NE* IV.3 1123b1–2, 1124a1–4, 1124b24–25, 1125a2–3, X.7 1177a21–22; *Met.* A.2 982b12–13). The magnificent man resembles a knower (*epistēmōn*), i.e., he is not a knower in the precise sense. As we learn in book VI of the *Ethics*, knowledge or science (*epistēmē*) in the precise sense means knowledge of the unchanging universals as opposed to the changing particulars (*NE* VI.2 1139a5–14, VI.6 1140b31–32). While the magnificent

⁴⁷ Consider also the resemblance of the witty man, who is "like a law unto himself" (*NE* IV.8 1128a32), to the philosopher, as discussed in Bartlett and Collins, "Interpretive Essay," 268–69.

⁴⁸ That is, the *kaloi kagathoi* or "noble and good ones," the persons of complete moral virtue (cf. *NE* IV.3 1124a1–4). The term *kaloi kagathoi*, like our term "gentlemen," also has a class connotation. Cf. Tessitore, *Reading Aristotle's "Ethics,"* 15–20; for a somewhat different account of Aristotle's intended audience see David K. O'Connor, "The Ambitions of Aristotle's Audience and the Activist Ideal of Happiness," in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, ed. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 107–29.

⁴⁹ Cf. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 143. Socrates was, of course, condemned by a democratic Athenian jury (cf. Plato, *Apology* 20e8–21a2). Aristotle's approach, I believe, is not entirely irrelevant to the problem of the survival of the humanities in modern universities.

man's grandeur of vision reminds us of that of the knower of universals, in fact he, the magnificent man, contemplates primarily the changing particulars (those related to making great expenditures here and now). More generally, it is clear from book VI as a whole that while the gentleman necessarily possesses prudence (the intellectual virtue essential to the practice of moral virtue), he does not necessarily possess or even pursue wisdom, the science of the most honorable or divine things (cf. *NE* VI.7 1141a9–b3, VI.13 1144b30–1145a11). Yet these profound differences between gentlemen and philosophers (about which much more might be said) do not do away with the links between them which we have noted.

For Aristotle, in sum, the tension between the noble and the good on the moral plane is fruitful because it points to a higher plane on which that tension may be resolved. Machiavelli, by contrast, teaches us to forget about the morally noble⁵⁰ and thus severs the thread that (according to Aristotle) leads upward. Only practical success, or the qualities that produce it, seem to matter. One must add that Machiavelli has in mind practical success of the loftiest kind: that of princes and above all of founders, men of the rank of Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus (*P* 6). Glory, not comfort, is the goal of such men. But whereas for Aristotle, glory or honor is sought as a confirmation of virtue, to which it is therefore subordinate (*NE* I.5 1095b26–30), for Machiavelli, virtue is a means to glory, which does not point clearly to anything above itself. Politics and war are no longer clearly subordinate to peace and leisure. The philosopher himself becomes a founder, and therefore a politician: Machiavelli, like Moses and the rest, introduces “new modes and orders” (*P* 6, *D* I Preface). And since he is a politician, he is also a warrior, since the art of politics and the art of war are the same (*P* 14 beg.).

Accordingly, gentlemen do not hold an honorable place in Machiavelli's scheme. In *The Prince* they are contemptible, selling themselves to the highest bidder (namely, Cesare Borgia).⁵¹ In the *Discourses* they are pernicious, since they represent a kind of inequality that is incompatible with a well-ordered republic. Of the German republics Machiavelli reports approvingly that if any gentlemen fall into their hands, they kill them (*D* I.55). He replaces

⁵⁰ This is not to deny that he teaches us to admire virtue, but this virtue is admirable primarily as a means to such ends as security, empire, and glory, rather than being an end in itself. For a higher estimate of the place of virtue in Machiavelli's thought, see J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the "Discourses on Livy"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 261–68.

⁵¹ *P* 7 (p. 28 in Mansfield's ed.). As to the sometimes virtuous Venetian gentlemen (*P* 12, p. 51), they do not count since they are gentlemen “more in name than in fact”; in reality they are merely wealthy merchants (*D* I.55).

the alliance between philosophers and gentlemen with one between princes (including philosophers who are princes) and peoples (cf. *P* 9, *D* I.16 [example of Clearchus]). This is possible because his philosophy is or at least presents itself as thoroughly useful or "effectual."⁵²

Machiavellian man pursues "glory and riches."⁵³ The Aristotelian gentleman is not indifferent to these goods, but his attachment to them is not wholehearted. As we have seen, what he most likes about having money is the opportunity it affords him of giving it away. Of glory or honor he unapologetically claims his due share, but his enjoyment of them is tempered by the awareness that there is "no honor worthy of complete virtue" (*NE* IV.3 1124a5–9). It is this noble ambivalence, more than naiveté, that explains why the gentleman is sometimes overcome by nongentlemen. For instance, because of his liberality, he would rather be cheated occasionally in business affairs than pay excessive attention to money (*NE* IV.1 1121a4–5; cf. V.10 1137b34–1138a2). For Aristotle, the difficulties involved in this ambivalence are, as we have seen, most fully resolved in the philosophic life. The gentleman does not honor money and yet needs it in order to be liberal; the philosopher, who also does not honor money, needs it much less: Socrates was poor and none the worse for it.

Pointing to philosophy, however, is insufficient, for most of us (whatever our delusions of grandeur) cannot be philosophers, and even a philosopher, however divine in his or her thinking, is still a human being who as such is not self-sufficient and must therefore live with other human beings (*NE* X.7 1177b26–34, X.8 1178b33–35). The leisure which is the basis of the good life for both gentlemen and philosophers requires a city (*polis*), a political community. The city and its regime have certain necessities (starting with self-preservation) which have to be respected.⁵⁴ Yet, as we see from Machiavelli, unqualified respect for those necessities can endanger the status of the moral virtues as noble ends in themselves. Aristotle addresses this problem by treating moral virtue somewhat differently in two separate, if connected, works, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, in such a way as to protect a

⁵² Strauss, while noting that Machiavelli's philosophy "on the whole" puts itself in the service of politics, also points to "the intransigent character of Machiavelli's theoretical concern" (*Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 296 and 81; cf. 282–90). I thank Marco Menon for reminding me of this ambiguity.

⁵³ "For one sees men, in the things that lead them to the end that each has before him, that is, glory and riches, proceeding variously" (*P* 25).

⁵⁴ On these and other grounds, it has been argued that a certain kind of statesmanship is essential to philosophy as Aristotle understands it. See Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's "Politics"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 125–67.

morality practiced for its own sake from the pressures of political expediency, even while giving expediency its due.⁵⁵ For example, in the *Ethics*, as we have seen, courage is presented as aiming at the noble, with no mention of the needs of the city. Even when Aristotle considers what he calls political or civic courage (which he distinguishes from courage proper), he does not say that citizens endure dangers for the sake of the city, but rather that they do so out of a concern for honor, which is something noble (*NE* III.8 1116a15–29). In the *Politics*, on the other hand, courage is presented as a necessary means to a political end, namely, the preservation of freedom and therefore of leisure (*Pol.* VII.15 1334a16–22).⁵⁶ More generally, in the *Politics* civic virtue comes to the fore, and it is plainly stated that this kind of virtue aims at an end beyond itself, namely, the preservation of the political community or regime (*Pol.* III.4 1276b27–31). The same utilitarian principle defines justice: justice is the common advantage, and what is destructive of the city cannot be just (*Pol.* III.10 1281a17–21, III.12 1282b16–18).⁵⁷ Considering the *Ethics* and the *Politics* together, we become aware of a certain tension between moral virtue as an end in itself and as oriented toward the common good.⁵⁸

From the perspective of the *Politics*, then, one's practice of the virtues must be affected by considerations of political expediency (even if virtue is also the highest end of politics).⁵⁹ How far one ought to go in this regard is difficult to say. But surely an Aristotelian ruler will not practice liberality or any other virtue in such a way as to endanger the regime (for this would not be just). Hence he will not reject out of hand the lessons, for example, of chapter 16 of *The Prince*.

Machiavelli might observe that lessons of this kind can often be learned more easily from him than from Aristotle. He might also complain that Aristotle's dual treatment of the moral virtues divides men's loyalties and deprives them of the will for necessary extreme measures (cf. *D* I.27; II.15, 23). Aristotle might reply that his treatment reflects an inescapable duality in the human condition. On one hand, man needs the city and so must serve and defend it; on the other, the city itself aims partly at an end above its own

⁵⁵ Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 22.

⁵⁶ Which I do not believe is contradicted by *Pol.* VII.15 1334a40–b4 and II.9 1271b7–10.

⁵⁷ Justice in the sense of that which promotes the welfare of the political community is mentioned also in the *Ethics*, but it is not this meaning of justice which Aristotle primarily investigates in that work (*NE* V.1–2 1129b11–1130a14, VIII.9 1160a11–14).

⁵⁸ On this tension see Collins, *Rediscovery of Citizenship*, e.g. 53–56, 76–80.

⁵⁹ Bartlett, "Realism' of Classical Political Science."

preservation, namely, the practice of the moral or other virtues as ends in themselves, or the life of noble leisure (*NE* I.9 1099b29–32 and context; *Pol.* III.9 1280b40–1281a4, VII.14 1333a30–b3, VII.15 1334a11–34). Expediency cannot be our only criterion, if expediency means doing whatever is necessary to obtain “glory and riches” or even to preserve the political community. For the intelligent pursuit of these ends is limited by the fact that they are not the highest ones. The question whether or how far this statement is true seems to lie at the heart of the moral controversy between Aristotle and Machiavelli.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cf. note 52 above.