

Interpretation

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**“Who Would Be Free, Themselves Must Strike the Blow”:
Revolt and Rhetoric in Douglass’s
Heroic Slave and Melville’s *Benito Cereno***

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Abstract: This essay considers two works of fiction to assess the merits of private violence as a responsible form of political action. Frederick Douglass’s *Heroic Slave* holds up a slave named Madison Washington, the leader of the successful uprising on the slave ship *Creole*, as an exemplar of the responsible use of violence. Herman Melville’s better-known *Benito Cereno* recounts the aftermath of a similar uprising on a Spanish slave-ship. But Melville’s story, while sympathetic to the plight of the oppressed, suggests that efforts to combat oppression through private violence are potentially tragic. Douglass’s acceptance of violent revolt as a means of liberation and progress rests on his assumption that rhetorical leadership can effectively constrain the passions. By contrast, Melville’s work challenges the assumption that, even in a just cause, private violence can be employed with this sort of dignified self-restraint or validate the claim of the oppressed to their natural rights.

This essay treats Frederick Douglass’s *Heroic Slave* and Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* as specimens of American political thought, utilizing them to assess the merits of private violence—that is, violence employed by one not acting on behalf of the state—as a responsible form of political action.¹ Published in 1853, Douglass’s tale recounts and greatly embellishes the 1841 slave uprising on the schooner *Creole*, holding up the leader of the revolt, a slave named Madison Washington, as an exemplar of the responsible use

¹ I am indebted to the many students with whom I have read these texts in my courses and to a number of colleagues for their helpful comments and suggestions, including Mary Mathie, Diana Schaub, Steve Amberg, Brad Thayer, Tim McCarty, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers.

of violence.² Herman Melville's better-known *Benito Cereno*, published two years later, recounts the aftermath of a similar slave uprising on a Spanish ship. However, Melville's story, while sympathetic to the plight of the oppressed, suggests that efforts to combat oppression through private violence are essentially tragic.

The point of difference between Douglass and Melville is not merely about the efficacy and propriety of violence as a means of liberation. It is, more fundamentally, about the role of persuasive oratory as a necessary precondition for the responsible and disciplined use of violence. Douglass's acceptance of violent revolt as a means of liberation rests on his assumption that rhetorical leadership can effectively constrain the passions. By contrast, Melville's work powerfully challenges the assumption that, even in a just cause, private violence is susceptible to this sort of dignified self-restraint and sufficient to win recognition for the natural rights of the oppressed from their oppressors.

While I place Melville's tale in dialogue with Douglass's *Heroic Slave*, I am not advancing the historical claim that Melville conceived of *Benito Cereno* as a response to Douglass. There is no direct evidence from Melville's utterances that indicates such an intent, but it is possible and even likely that he would have encountered Douglass's novella given the literary attention they paid to each other throughout the early 1850s. Melville had encountered Douglass's work, particularly the *Narrative*, in the 1840s and it seems to have exerted some influence on his own writing.³ Douglass had in turn reprinted passages from Melville's works and featured reviews of them in his own paper, the *North Star*.⁴ Later, in 1855, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* featured a positive review of Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in the same issue with one of the installments of Melville's *Benito Cereno*.⁵ As Robert K. Wallace notes, "Douglass and Melville moved in physical proximity between 1840 and 1850 and in mutual awareness between 1847 and 1855."⁶

² Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2003), 219–46 (hereafter cited in the text as *HS*).

³ John Ernest, "Revolutionary Fictions and Activist Labor: Looking for Douglass and Melville Together," in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville: Essays in Relation*, ed. Robert S. Levine and Samuel Otter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 19–38; William Gleason, "Volcanoes and Meteors: Douglass, Melville, and the Poetics of Insurrection," in *ibid.*, 110–33; Sterling Stuckey, "Cheer and Gloom: Douglass and Melville on Slave Dance and Music," in *ibid.*, 69–87.

⁴ For example, *The North Star* reprinted "Tattooing" from *Typee*, June 2, 1848.

⁵ *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, November 1855, 547, 467–71.

⁶ Robert K. Wallace, *Douglass and Melville: Anchored Together in Neighborly Style* (New Bedford,

Of particular salience is their common concern with the political and moral problems attending the enforcement of the fugitive slave law. Melville’s father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw, played a formative role in the way these questions played out in public discourse and in the careers of Melville and Douglass. As chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court from 1830 to 1860, Shaw at first earned an antislavery reputation for seizing on every opportunity to manumit slaves brought voluntarily by their masters into Massachusetts, thus laying the foundation for what became known as “liberty laws” in the free states. Then, in the 1840s and 1850s, Shaw found himself at odds with abolitionists over his strict adherence to the dictates of the federal fugitive slave laws. Douglass’s role as a prominent abolitionist had its origin during the 1842 controversy over the rendition of George Latimer under the fugitive slave law, a case over which Shaw presided and in which Melville later took a retrospective interest. For the most part, Douglass invested his time in leading public rallies and giving speeches during the Latimer affair, but on at least one occasion William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* (which closely covered the controversy) published his remarks on behalf of Latimer alongside a defense of Shaw’s judicial duty to enforce the fugitive slave law irrespective of his personal convictions. A decade later, after Melville and Douglass had gained a mutual awareness of one another, Shaw would again prove a linkage between them when he sent Thomas Sims of Boston back to slavery in Georgia under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Douglass’s paper covered the case extensively and Douglass himself featured it in his vocal opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act, while Melville increasingly embedded the conflict between natural justice and positive law in his novels.⁷ Shaw’s insistence on the judicial duty to administer positive law faithfully even when in conflict with natural justice gave rise to a central debate in American constitutionalism that, according to Robert Cover and William Weicek, finds its most profound treatment in *Billy Budd*.⁸ While the physical proximity, mutual awareness, and common concerns of Douglass and Melville are insufficient grounds for treating them as being self-consciously in dialogue with each other, these considerations do at least strengthen the rationale for treating them together where

MA: Spinner Publications, 2005), 3.

⁷ Robert K. Wallace, “Fugitive Justice: Douglass, Shaw, and Melville,” in Levine and Otter, *Douglass and Melville*, 50–51, 60–61.

⁸ Robert M. Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 1–7; William Weicek, “Lawyers, Abolitionists, and the Problem of Unjust Laws,” in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 234–35.

the particular works in question share so similar a subject matter as do the *Heroic Slave* and *Benito Cereno*.

The remainder of the essay proceeds in three sections. I first set the scene with a brief account of slave uprisings in the United States and its neighboring territories. This discussion imparts some of the background knowledge that Douglass and Melville would have taken for granted in their antebellum audience. I then turn in successive sections to consider Douglass's and Melville's tales.

SLAVE UPRISING

The works under consideration here are based to varying degrees on actual slave uprisings at sea that had, as part of a long-running series of slave revolts in the United States and Haiti, captured public attention, prodding the American conscience and stoking public anxiety over the fate of slaves and slaveholders. A brief account of these violent episodes will furnish some context for the ensuing treatment of Melville's and Douglass's fictionalized accounts.

Two slave revolts in particular loomed large in the public mind. The Haitian Revolution began in 1791 in the French colony of Sainte-Domingue and eventually produced the independent Republic of Haiti after a thirteen-year struggle. For much of that time, the revolution proceeded under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave. While it was successful considered in terms of its political result, the protracted conflict rivaled the brutality of the French Revolution. While the scenes of the Haitian Revolution lingered long in the American imagination, it would be overshadowed by Nat Turner's revolt in Southampton, Virginia, in 1831. Turner's three-day rampage began with four accomplices and grew to a force of seventy or more. Convinced that, like Moses and Joshua, he was carrying out a divine command, Turner's band went from house to house, murdering every white person they could find, without regard to age or sex. His own chilling account of the killing spree, dictated to his lawyer, describes the methodical braining of defenseless families in their beds and of infants in their cribs. The fifty-seven victims even included ten children they encountered playing in a schoolyard and the elderly woman supervising them.⁹

Slave uprisings at sea were of particular interest, for they tended to incite diplomatic controversies between slaveholding and free nations and

⁹ *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, reprinted in *The Long Walk to Freedom: Runaway Slave Narratives*, ed. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (Boston: Beacon, 2012), 125–42.

protracted legal disputes arising from the ambivalence of international law toward slavery. The 1840s witnessed two cases pertinent to our own present examination, the cases of *La Amistad* and of the *Creole*. The uprising on the schooner *La Amistad* in 1839 and the ensuing legal battle are likely familiar to readers from the 1997 film of the same name. The uprising involved Mende captives, originally from Sierra Leone. *La Amistad* was carrying fifty-three of these captives from the slave market in Havana to the plantation on which they were to work. Though shackled, the captives were permitted to move about the vessel, as it was not equipped with slave berths. Some of the men found a rusty file in the hold, where roughly half of them were stowed, and used it to break their bonds. A number of the men then took the ship by force under the leadership of Singbe Pieh, popularly referred to as Joseph Cinque, slaying the captain and several of the crew with the machete-like knives used for cutting sugar cane. Under threat of death, the Spanish owners agreed to navigate the ship back to Africa, but in fact proceeded to sail up the east coast of the United States until a revenue cutter, the USS *Washington*, interdicted the *Amistad* off the coast of Long Island and hauled it into New London, Connecticut. The surviving Spanish crew laid claim to the slaves and other cargo on the ground that they were engaged in the domestic Spanish slave trade, arguing that the Mende captives had in fact been born in Cuba and not kidnapped from Africa. In 1841, the Supreme Court sided with the Mende captives and their abolitionist supporters, including John Quincy Adams who had argued their case before the Court. In an opinion written by Justice Joseph Story, the Court declared them free persons “upon the eternal principles of justice and international law.”¹⁰

The uprising on the *Creole* a few months later provoked even greater public controversy, including a diplomatic dispute with the British authorities.¹¹ On October 25, 1841, the *Creole* departed Richmond with a cargo of

¹⁰ Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 193–95.

¹¹ The relevant historical documents are contained in a report to Congress from Secretary of State Daniel Webster: U.S. Congress, Senate, *Correspondence in relation to the mutiny on board the Brig Creole*, January 20, 1842, 27th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1842, S. Doc. 51. The ensuing account is taken from these documents and from Arthur T. Downey, *The Creole Affair: The Slave Rebellion That Led the U.S. and Great Britain to the Brink of War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 9–16. For other scholarly accounts of the uprising, see Howard Jones, “The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the *Creole* Slave Revolt,” *Civil War History* 21 (1975): 28–33; George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick, *The Creole Mutiny: A Tale of a Revolt aboard a Slave Ship* (Chicago: Dee, 2003); Edward D. Jervy and C. Harold Huber, “The *Creole* Affair,” *Journal of Negro History* 65 (1980): 196–211; Walter Johnson, “White Lies: Human Property and Domestic Slavery aboard the Slave Ship *Creole*,” *Atlantic Studies* 5 (2008): 237–63.

tobacco and slaves bound for New Orleans. Among the 135 slaves was one Madison Washington, listed in the manifest as a twenty-two-year-old black male standing five feet, nine and a half inches tall. He had escaped to Canada some years earlier and, after residing there for a time, returned to rescue his wife from the Virginia plantation where she remained in bondage. After his capture, he was “sold South” for the New Orleans slave market as part of the great redistribution of slaves from the mid-Atlantic states to the vast new plantations in the deep South. Washington served as head cook for the slaves and was, along with a number of helpers, responsible for cooking and distributing their meals, a task that furnished him with the opportunity to converse freely and plan an uprising without suspicion. The slaves were not shackled and were apparently permitted to walk freely about the ship during the day. At night, the ship’s rules confined the women, who made up about a third of the slaves, to the aft hold and the men to the forward hold. The vessel carried sixteen whites. The *Creole’s* captain, Robert Ensor, brought along his wife, his four-year-old daughter, and his fifteen-year-old niece. The crew consisted of First Mate Zepheniah Gifford, Second Mate Lucius Stevens, and six additional sailors. To these were added four passengers, two of whom represented one of the slave owners and two of whom were trading their services aboard the ship in exchange for passage.

On the night of November 7, the ship hove to off the coast of Florida and lay in calm waters about two hundred miles to the northeast of Miami. The first mate, Gifford, was on watch when one of the crew spotted a male slave entering the women’s quarters in the aft hold. Gifford sent William Merritt, one of the passengers who had agreed to serve as guard in exchange for passage, to investigate. When Merritt discovered Madison Washington and chastised him for being there against the ship’s rules, Washington sprang from the aft hold and charged forward, shaking off Gifford and Merritt and shouting to the other male slaves: “We have commenced boys, and must go through; rush boys, rush aft; we have got them now.” The ensuing struggle involved nineteen of the male slaves, armed with knives, clubs, and a pistol they had smuggled on board, under the leadership of Washington and another man named Ben Johnstone—or, in some of the depositions, Ben Blacksmith. The crew and passengers offered some armed resistance, but were quickly subdued. John Hewell, a passenger representing the interests of one of the slave owners, was the only fatality. When he emerged from the hold with a musket, the mutineers stabbed him repeatedly and later threw his corpse overboard. Captain Ensor suffered a number of serious stab wounds in the scuffle, but survived by climbing into the rigging along with Gifford

and Lucius Stevens, the second mate. Washington and Johnstone demanded that the surviving crew sail the *Creole* to Liberia, but were dissuaded from doing so when told the ship lacked adequate provisions for such a long journey. They then insisted on sailing to a British port, having heard stories of the British emancipating slaves from wrecked ships in the Bahamas. Merritt and the mates advised sailing to Nassau, where they arrived on the morning of November 9.

A pilot boat met the *Creole* to guide her through the narrow channel formed by Hog Island (now Paradise Island) and Nassau Harbor. The pilot crew that boarded the *Creole* consisted of free blacks who confidently (but without any real authority) informed its anxious passengers that they were in British waters and should consider themselves free. When the harbormaster arrived in his own boat to inspect the *Creole*, the first mate, Gifford, informed him that the ship had been mutinied and returned with him to Nassau where he sought out the American consul, who in turn demanded that the British authorities confine the slaves on board the *Creole*. The British authorities on the island subsequently took the nineteen mutineers into custody and, after some days, permitted the remaining slaves to disembark and melt into the island's community. Contrary to American demands, the British ultimately released the nineteen mutineers as well. The intrastate slave trade was still legal, unlike the international slave trade, and the uprising thus constituted mutiny. Nevertheless, the mutiny was not a violation of British law because it had not occurred in British waters nor on a British vessel, nor involved any British persons. The mutineers were therefore liable to prosecution only under US law. As there was not at the time an extradition treaty between the United States and Great Britain, the nineteen were released and faded, as had their peers, into Bahamian society.

THE HEROIC SLAVE

Douglass's novella about the slave uprising on the *Creole* is his only work of fiction, written as a contribution to a gift-book sponsored by the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society to raise funds for Douglass's newspaper.¹² The volume featured a number of distinguished contributors, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Seward, Charles Sumner, William Goodell, John G. Whittier, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Horace Greeley, and Lewis Tappan. Douglass carefully chose the protagonist of his story and structured the

¹² Julia Griffiths, ed., *Autographs for Freedom* (Boston: Jewett, 1853).

narrative to advance the cause of slave revolt in the American South. While seemingly straightforward, Douglass's account of Madison Washington's saga is a multilayered narrative. Its complexity reflects both Douglass's own waning ambivalence toward violence as a means of political reform and the distinct concerns of his potential audience. That audience variously consisted of runaway slaves, free blacks, moderate white northerners, pacifist and militant abolitionists alike, and even the slaveholders among whom he enjoyed a growing infamy on account of his autobiographical *Narrative*.

The novella may appropriately be termed historical fiction. While it follows in large part the historical trajectory of Madison Washington's life, it embellishes considerably in certain respects. Its most important episodes are heavily laden with speeches from Washington, which had to be fabricated. We do know from descriptions of Washington and his exploits that he (like Douglass) was reputed to be an articulate and compelling speaker, but there are no records of the discourses of the kind that stand at the center of the *Heroic Slave*. With respect to the uprising on the *Creole*, the diplomatic and legal controversies that resulted from it produced a thorough documentary record, of which I have given a brief account in the preceding section and from which Douglass's tale departs liberally. We will have occasion to note these departures in the course of the discussion.

In the first of the novella's four scenes, set six years prior to the uprising on the *Creole*, the reader encounters Washington in the midst of a soliloquy on the wretchedness of his condition and the prospect of escape from the Virginia plantation where he is enslaved. Resolving to possess himself of "liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man," Washington undergoes a transformation familiar from Douglass's own autobiographies. Douglass writes, "At that moment he was free, at least in spirit. The future gleamed bright before him, and his fetters lay broken at his feet." More importantly, though Washington speaks only for himself, a northern traveler named Listwell overhears the moving soliloquy from concealment and undergoes a quiet conversion. "From this hour I am an abolitionist," he silently declares to himself, and professes his resolve to "atone for my past indifference" (*HS* 221–23). The reader is thus aware from the outset of the profoundly persuasive effect that Madison Washington's rhetoric has on his hearers.

In the novella's second scene, set five years later, Listwell is surprised to find Madison Washington on his own doorstep in Ohio, a fugitive on his way to Canada where he can "nestle in the mane of the British lion, protected by the mighty paw from the talons and the beak of the American eagle" (*HS* 233).

For his part, the travel-worn Washington is shocked to find that this stranger recognizes him and even more so to find that he is credited with Listwell’s conversion to abolitionism. Having sheltered there and then departed, the reader learns via a letter to Listwell that Washington is safe in Canada.

A year later, the third scene finds Listwell again traveling in Virginia, where he has yet another providential encounter with Washington, who is now in chains and on his way to the slave market in Richmond. He is to be sold into the deep South, his ultimate destination the New Orleans slave market. Listwell is struck dumb to find his friend in irons in the Old Dominion rather than free in Canada. But we soon discover that Washington has hazarded (and lost) his own freedom in an attempt to liberate the wife he had been forced to leave behind in his earlier escape. The rescue attempt has ended with her death and his capture. Unable to purchase his friend’s freedom, Listwell slips Washington three files, which, in Douglass’s tale, Washington will use to break his own bonds and those of his nineteen accomplices (*HS* 240–41). Douglass is here borrowing from the narrative of the *Amistad* uprising, since, as we see from the documentary record, no such extraordinary measure was necessary, as the slaves aboard the *Creole* were not shackled.

Unlike the first three scenes, where the reader witnesses the encounters between Listwell and Washington through the voice of the narrator, the fourth conveys the circumstances of the slaves’ uprising on the *Creole* through a retrospective dialogue between Tom Grant, who had been the *Creole*’s mate, and another sailor named Jack Williams in a “marine coffee-house” full of incredulous southerners at Richmond. Williams impugns Grant’s manhood for having failed to put down the uprising, on the ground that black men are cowards and easily subdued. Grant denies that this theory of black cowardice “will stand the test of salt water,” where there is no government ready at hand to put down with alacrity the least outburst of black courage and “every breeze speaks of courage and liberty” (*HS* 242). While the disparity in the races may stand “as a general rule,” Madison Washington’s conduct was at least “cause to admit that there are exceptions to this general rule. The leader of the mutiny was just as shrewd a fellow as I ever met in my life, and was as well fitted to lead in a dangerous enterprise as any one white man in ten thousand” (*HS* 244). To support his contention, Grant testifies to Washington’s intelligence, articulate mode of speech, dignified bearing, courage and physical prowess in combat, mercy in victory, and composure in a storm. Grant dwells particularly on Washington’s conduct after the slaves had taken the ship. Claiming to have been unconscious for much of the struggle, grant

recalls waking on deck to find the crew in the rigging and Washington at the helm. Indignant at finding a “black murderer” in command, he admonished the crew to come down and retake the ship “or die in the attempt.” Yet Washington’s “strong, black arm” repelled his advance “as though [he] had been a boy of twelve.” Washington followed this demonstration of strength with inspiring oratory:

Sir, your life is in my hands. I could have killed you a dozen times over during this last half hour, and could kill you now. You call me a black murderer. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not malice, is the motive for this night’s work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom, and if a true man’s heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they.

Grant declared to his drinking companions that this speech “disarmed” him. “I forgot his blackness in the dignity of his manner, and the eloquence of his speech. It seemed as if the souls of both the great dead (whose names he bore) had entered him.” After guaranteeing the safety of the surviving crew on the condition that they assist in sailing the ship to Nassau, Washington mans the helm through a tremendous squall, through which “our brig rolled and creaked as if every bolt would be started, and every thread of oakum would be pressed out of the seams.” The white sailors (Grant excepted, of course) clung to the ship, refusing from terror to man the pumps. But Washington “stood firmly at the helm, his keen eye fixed upon the binnacle. He was not indifferent to the dreadful hurricane; yet he met it with the equanimity of an old sailor.” More to the point, again Washington’s eloquence confirmed his deeds as those of a great man. As the storm subsides, he utters to Grant, “Mr. Mate, you cannot write the bloody laws of slavery on those restless billows. The ocean, if not the land, is free.” This utterance provokes Grant’s final assessment of Washington’s character. “I confess, gentlemen, I felt myself in the presence of a superior man; one who, had he been a white man, I would have followed willingly and gladly in any honorable enterprise. Our difference of color was the only ground for difference of action. It was not that his principles were wrong in the abstract; for they are the principles of 1776. But I could not bring myself to recognize their application to one whom I deemed my inferior.” Because of Washington’s restraint in sparing the lives of the white sailors and his courage in the face of the storm, Grant sees in his conduct not only physical courage, but its connection to the American tradition of natural rights and their vindication through manly resistance

to tyranny (HS 245–47). Grant’s grudging admission of Washington’s equality with, even superiority to, himself does not extend to a general negation of the inequality of the races, but it was a significant argument to put into the mouth of a white sailor in a Virginia tavern in the 1840s. The same may be said of Grant’s public denunciation of the interstate slave trade, which he denominates a “disgrace and scandal to Old Virginia,” and of his resolution “never to set my foot on the deck of a slave ship, either as officer, or common sailor again,” both of which earn derision as “Garrisonian” from his interlocutors (HS 243).

Douglass finds in Madison Washington the ideal protagonist. His display of courage in returning from Canada to rescue his wife and of nobility in eschewing vengeance as a motive made him a sympathetic figure. His moderation in the use of violence made him more palatable than Nat Turner. He was an American, unlike those aboard the *Amistad*. His small revolt met a happy end, a rare outcome for slave revolts. And his name aided the central analogy with the “principles of 1776.” From the outset, Douglass frames Madison Washington as deserving of inclusion in the pantheon of Virginian statesmen, who “love liberty as well as did Patrick Henry—who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson—and who fought for it with a valor as high, and arms as strong, and against odds as great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence” (HS 220).

The Heroic Slave is not the first instance of Douglass’s reliance on Madison Washington as an exemplar. In an 1849 speech, he had made extensive use of the narrative to rebut the renewed efforts of the American Colonization Society. Though the immediate audience of the speech was an assembly of free black men, he addressed himself quite explicitly to slaveholders and advocates of colonization. Or, rather, he modeled for those free men of color how they ought to respond to slaveholders and colonizers. “The slaveholders are sleeping on slumbering volcanoes, if they did but know it.” There could be no bloodless answer to the slave question but emancipation. Black men had a claim on American soil as their own. They would not be banished from it and the continuation of their bondage was as dangerous as it was oppressive. “The cry of the slave goes up to heaven to God, and unless the American people shall break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free, that spirit in man which abhors chains, and will not be restrained by them, will lead those sable arms

that have long been engaged in cultivating, beautifying, and adorning the South, to spread death and devastation there.”¹³

The slumbering volcano argument, that slaveholders are in great peril of a bloody insurrection, was a familiar one. Even Garrison, the pacifist apostle of moral suasion, had relied on such warnings to impress on his audience the urgency of immediate emancipation. But Douglass went beyond mere apocalyptic warning to positively endorse the prospect.

I want them to know that at least one coloured man in the Union, peace man though he is, would greet with joy the glad news should it come here tomorrow, that an insurrection had broken out in the Southern states. I want them to know that a black man cherishes that sentiment—that one of the fugitive slaves holds it and that it is not impossible that some other black men may have occasion at some time or other, to put this theory into practice. Sir, I want to alarm the slaveholders, and not to alarm them by mere declamation or by mere bold assertions, but to show them that there is really danger in persisting in the crime of continuing slavery in this land. I want them to know that there are some Madison Washingtons in this country.¹⁴

As Larry Reynolds has pointed out, Douglass’s sanguine view of slave uprising was an exceptional departure from the Christian pacifism that marked both his earlier association with the Garrisonians and his postwar insistence on patient political reform. Even the failure of Reconstruction and the growing cancer of lynching was not enough to dislodge his rejection of violent revolt as a means of combating injustice. It is essential to understand that violent revolt here refers to violence on a large scale to remedy the injustice of an institution or entrenched practice, as opposed to discrete instances of forceful self-defense against immediate threats to oneself. Douglass consistently admitted the right of self-defense against immediate threats of bodily harm while generally rejecting the use of violence on a large scale as a means of progress. His departure from this general aversion to large-scale violence was warranted, in Douglass’s mind, by the close analogy between slaveholding and kidnapping, which permitted violent resistance on a large scale to be justified as self-defense. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 greatly strengthened the analogy by depriving free blacks of any effective legal protection from the threat of enslavement under the auspices of lawful fugitive slave rendition. Madison Washington furnished Douglass

¹³ “Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano: An Address Delivered in New York,” April 23, 1849, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 151–53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

with an exemplar of black resistance that reconciled the need for violent self-assertion in the face of such systemic oppression with the maintenance of the moral and legal order that is central to human dignity.¹⁵

Washington’s example, at least as reimagined in the novella, also fits neatly with Douglass’s broader political philosophy. As Peter Myers has recently reminded us, Douglass was a devotee of natural rights liberalism. He begins from the familiar premise that liberty is “the presumptive property of all human beings, unearned by any specific achievement.” Yet, “natural rights could not exist as a common human possession absent their active effortful affirmation by those denied their exercise.” In sum, “Douglass affirmed at once the presumptive validity of all human beings’ title to natural rights and the moral imperative for tyranny’s victims actively to validate their title to those rights.”¹⁶

In this way, Douglass turns resistance into a virtue. The enjoyment of liberty requires recognition of one’s full humanity. And for the oppressed this means the assertion of one’s humanity through struggle.¹⁷ This is why, in his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, published just two years after *The Heroic Slave*, the central episode that marks the end of bondage is not his escape from slavery. It is instead the first instance of his having resolved never again to suffer a beating like a beast. Titled “The Last Flogging,” this crucial chapter recounts Douglass’s successful resistance to the efforts of the slave breaker Edward Covey, to whom he had been loaned, to beat him. “I was a changed being after that fight. I was *nothing* before; I WAS A MAN NOW. It recalled to life my crushed self-respect and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a FREEMAN.” “I had reached the point, at which I was *not afraid to die*. This spirit made me a freeman in *fact*, while I remained a slave in *form*.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Larry J. Reynolds, *Righteous Violence: Revolution, Slavery, and the American Renaissance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), chap. 3. See also Leslie Friedman Goldstein, “Violence as an Instrument for Social Change: The Views of Frederick Douglass,” *Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 1 (1967): 61–72.

¹⁶ C. Peter Myers, *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 63.

¹⁷ Some readers may find the Hegelian dimensions of Douglass’s account thought provoking, particularly as it tracks the struggle for recognition in the master-slave dialectic, though this is a line of inquiry the present article does not pursue. It does not appear that Douglass directly encountered Hegelian thought until reading Feuerbach later in life, but for a reinterpretation of his earlier thought utilizing Hegelian ideas, see Margaret Kohn, “Frederick Douglass’s Master-Slave Dialectic,” *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 497–514.

¹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed.

The centrality of self-assertion, as opposed to mere moral suasion or political agitation, to successful abolitionism formed an essential point in Douglass's urging violent resistance in response to fugitive slave rendition. With growing indignation, he penned the following brief editorial in his own newspaper in 1854: "A good revolver, a steady hand, and a determination to shoot down any man attempting to kidnap. Let every colored man make up his mind to this, and live by it, and if needs be, die by it. This will put an end to kidnapping and to slaveholding, too. We blush to our very soul when we are told that a negro is so mean and cowardly that he prefers to live under the slave driver's whip—to the loss of life for liberty. Oh! that we had a little more of the manly indifference to death, which characterized the Heroes of the American Revolution."¹⁹

There is an apparent tension between this view of courageous, or manly, resistance and natural rights liberalism. Taken by itself, early modern liberalism is grounded in a fear of death, an avoidance of threats to one's security. Rational individuals consent to forgo natural freedom in order to secure their life, liberty, and property. By contrast, Douglass repeatedly suggests that genuine liberty lies in a "manly indifference to death." He became a "freeman in fact," not when his life, liberty, and property were secure, but when he "was not afraid to die." Yet I would argue that, in this, Douglass's thought is indicative of a qualified liberalism that he shares with the American founders. That generation received an education that was liberal and modern in its philosophical dimensions, but leavened with exposure to the histories of Plutarch, Livy, and Thucydides. Their philosophical convictions were grounded in natural rights liberalism, but their historical exemplars were marked by a commitment to virtue, honor, and greatness. The product, vivid in Douglass's thought, is a liberal political philosophy that prescribes the limited ends of the regime married to a classical republican political morality that demands virtue in the citizen and the statesman.²⁰ This is to say nothing of the Christian morality that so powerfully governed private life and public attitudes that Tocqueville was moved to

Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 286.

¹⁹ "A Good Revolver," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 9, 1854, reprinted in *Witness for Freedom: African American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation*, ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 184.

²⁰ Nicholas Buccola has similarly advanced the argument that Douglass's liberalism is wisely attentive to the indispensable role of social responsibility in preserving liberty. See Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

ascribe to it the character of a political institution of the American democracy, notwithstanding Christianity’s lack of formal political power.²¹

Because Douglass conceives it as a virtue—a display of one’s full humanity and a practical argument for one’s fitness for ordered liberty—resistance also has to take a dignified form. It is not rage or the loss of control, but righteous violence employed with a proper end in mind. As Myers has noted, a measure of prudence is here implied. Resistance should be effective. It is not violence for its own sake. As Douglass noted in his defense of the mob that had killed an agent of the federal government in Boston to free a fugitive slave, “he who takes pleasure in human slaughter is very properly looked on as a moral monster.”²² Douglass consistently justified violent resistance to fugitive slave rendition as self-defense against kidnapping. He was always careful to draw an analogy with the Revolution.

This is why Madison Washington’s example is of great significance. His courageous resistance is coupled with a noble commitment to justice and mercy. In Douglass’s account, Washington is careful to avoid unnecessary killing. As he tells Grant, when he recovers consciousness to find Washington in control of the vessel and denounces him as a black murderer, “I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not malice, is the motive for this night’s work.... We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they” (*HS* 245). There is, of course, a certain ambiguity here. The analogy does not express certainty that the revolutionary generation was justified in resorting to bloodshed, only that if they were justified then so are the slaves. The necessary inference is that the real slavery from which the slaves aboard the *Creole*, and by extension all of America’s slaves, seek liberation is far greater than the tyranny from which the revolutionary fathers sought liberation.

Douglass’s narrative also reveals the ground of agreement that remained between Douglass and the Garrisonians. He, like Garrison, believes in moral suasion, but avers that it can only be effective when the black man has demonstrated his manhood through resistance, through “manly indifference to death.” He had taken to heart Lord Byron’s refrain, with which he opens the final section of *The Heroic Slave*, where the uprising on the *Creole* is recounted by the surviving ship’s mate: “Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye

²¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.2.9.

²² “Is It Right to Kill a Kidnapper?,” in Foner and Taylor, *Frederick Douglass: His Speeches and Writings*, 277.

not who would be free, themselves must strike the blow? By their right arms the conquest must be wrought.”²³

The great success of Washington’s revolt is confirmed not so much in the fact of his having secured his own freedom and that of the other 134 enslaved persons aboard the *Creole*, but in his having won recognition of his full humanity from the crew of the slave ship. That a white sailor like Grant, whom he had bested, would take up the cause of his heroism puts proof to Lord Byron’s admonition. The liberation of the slaves aboard the *Creole* might well have been accomplished through mere violence. But the recognition of black equality could only be secured by heroism—violence meted out in accordance with virtue and eschewing cruelty.

An important message for the northern abolitionist lies in this narrative as well. Contrast the material aid furnished by Listwell, which required that he conceal his abolitionism, with the vocal advocacy of the mate. Listwell’s advocacy of black equality, had he chosen to give voice to it, would have fallen on deaf ears in a Virginia tavern, disdained as the ignorant views of a meddling northerner. But Grant, having met Madison as adversary, could not be so easily dismissed. Abolitionists were indispensable material support, but their sermons could win few southern converts. Black men’s deeds, on the other hand, would win them a hearing for their claim to natural rights. This very same rationale drove Douglass’s energetic efforts to secure black enlistments in the Union army during the Civil War, his two sons among them.²⁴ This also helps bridge the gap between Douglass’s militant outlook in the 1850s and his later emphasis on self-elevation in the Reconstruction era.²⁵

In Douglass’s narrative, persuasive oratory is a necessary precondition for the responsible and disciplined use of violence. Douglass’s acceptance of violent revolt as a means of liberation and progress rests on his assumption that rhetorical leadership, coupled with great deeds, can effectively constrain the passions. He assumes that an able rhetor can appeal to the dignity and decency of the revolutionary, combating the thirst for vengeance and preventing atrocity. Madison Washington persuades the white moderate to adopt abolitionism, the captive slave to exercise dignified restraint in the use

²³ Lord Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, in *Selected Poetry of Lord Byron*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand (New York: Modern Library, 2002), Canto 2.76.

²⁴ See, e.g., “Men of Color, to Arms!,” March 23, 1863; “Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, April 1863, in Foner and Taylor, *Speeches and Writings*, 525–30.

²⁵ See, e.g., Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, March 8, 1853; “What the Black Man Wants,” speech at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Boston, April 1865.

of violence, and the terrified white sailors to trust their lives to his mercy. Absent these rhetorical feats, the revolt aboard the *Creole* either could not happen or would amount to an act of mere vengeance.

BENITO CERENO

Published in 1855, two years after the appearance of Douglass’s novella, Melville’s *Benito Cereno* arguably provides a starkly different view of slave revolt.²⁶ Melville’s work powerfully challenges the assumption that, even in a just cause, private violence can be employed with this sort of dignified self-restraint and win recognition for the oppressed from their oppressors. A story that seems to have no clear protagonist, Melville’s tale holds up for our scrutiny Babo, a diminutive but cunning slave who leads the revolt on the Spanish slave ship *San Dominick* (a ship that, like the South, has all the decaying grandeur of the old world). Babo adeptly inspires fear in his former captors, but not confidence or trust. His ability to control the other slaves and manipulate the whites bespeaks intelligence and great rhetorical ability. But the race prejudice that forms the context of his actions makes the sort of open heroism displayed by Madison Washington impossible. Relying on, rather than combating, the desire for vengeance among his fellow captives, he uses measured brutality to terrify the ship’s captain and remaining crew into aiding him, the most vivid instance being the display of the slain slave-owner’s skeleton on the prow of the ship as a reminder to the Spaniards of their constant peril.

An American merchant vessel captained by the New Englander Amasa Delano discovers the Spanish ship. Babo, posing as the devoted manservant to the terrified Spanish captain, cunningly deceives the American into believing that the *San Dominick* has fallen prey to misfortune and lost its crew to illness, which the naive New Englander, “a man of such native simplicity as to be incapable of satire or irony,” is more than willing to believe (BC 52). Delano’s naive assumptions about Babo as the typical loyal servant prove false. Standing in for the moderate northerner—the Unionist—Delano misperceives his situation. His prejudice leads him to see Babo’s submission as natural and his devotion to the frail Spanish captain as an endearing virtue.

This is nowhere more vivid than in the celebrated shaving scene, an image thick with meaning. At one point, Delano finds himself in the cabin,

²⁶ Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, ed. Wyn Kelley (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *BC*.

where Babo prepares to shave Don Benito. Seated in an improvised barber's chair that "seemed some grotesque engine of torment" and unceremoniously draped in the Spanish flag, Don Benito appears "a man at the block" and Babo "a headsman." Yet Delano sets his mind at ease, musing, "Most Negros are natural valets and hairdresser." Their "smooth tact" with the implements and their "great gift of good humor" make their avocations about the person "singularly pleasing to behold and still more so to be the manipulated subject of." To this is added "the docility arising from the contentment of a limited mind, and that susceptibility of blind attachment sometimes inhering in indisputable inferiors," which for Delano explains the peculiar interactions between his host and Babo. His prejudices even lead him to explain away the "terrified aspect" of Don Benito when Babo draws "barber's blood" from his neck as Delano notes with some incredulity that no vessel ought, as Benito had claimed of his own, to have been becalmed for two months in waters where Delano had found fair winds. Babo's not so subtle threat was clear enough to the terrified slaveholder, sitting with his head upon the block, but is lost upon the willfully blind New Englander (*BC* 72–76).

Correspondingly, Delano can only see self-assertion in Babo (or, by extension, any black man) as a vice, as an unnatural arrogation of equal dignity and natural rights. Of course, we must ask, would Delano see Madison Washington's actions as any more heroic? The truth, concealed by Melville from the reader (who thus shares in Delano's naiveté), is that Cereno's seeming security in fact papers over the real terror and peril in which the slaveholder lives.²⁷ As Diana Schaub observes, the narrative of *Benito Cereno* "captures the curious character of antebellum politics: the South, beneath its empty posturing, desperate and in effect held hostage to slavery; the North, by turns generous and suspicious, duped into complicity of sorts; and in between, the undiscovered quantity of black power."²⁸ Delano's (and the unwary reader's) prejudice makes him a gullible mark for Babo's ruse and at the same time makes it impossible for him to see Babo's heroism once the true situation on the *San Dominick* is clear.

Babo anticipates this prejudice and prudently chooses deception over open self-assertion in dealing with the inquisitive American captain, a strategy

²⁷ Susan McWilliams, "The Tragedy in American Political Thought," *American Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (2014): 137–45.

²⁸ Diana Schaub, "Master and Man in Melville's *Benito Cereno*," in *Poets, Princes, and Private Citizens: Literary Alternatives to Postmodern Politics*, ed. Joseph M. Knippenberg and Peter Augustine Lawler (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 57.

perhaps more likely to succeed in the instant case but one that also obscures his heroism. It promises more success in winning bodily freedom but less in winning recognition of black equality. This is not to say that Babo's conduct is anything less than heroic or indeed in any manner evil. Nor does Melville present him as such. Quite the contrary. As Catherine Zuckert argues, “By organizing not only the rebellion against their former masters but also a certain degree of order on the *San Dominick*, Babo had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he and his race were neither the innocent combination of animal ferocity and affection Delano imagined nor the devils and cannibals Cereno believed savagely murdered his friend [and their former master, whose skeleton now hung upon the ship's prow]. They were rational beings who were willing to risk their lives in order to gain their freedom. They had shown themselves in fact to be capable of self-rule.”²⁹ The intractability of racism does not so much negate Babo's heroism as conceal it beneath a veneer of necessary brutality, which makes the full recognition of his humanity all the less likely.

That Babo grasps the tragic aspect of his plight is manifest in his refusal to speak in his own defense from the time of his capture until his eventual trial before Peruvian authorities. The meaning of this silence is apparent even to Amasa Delano, who later remarks in remembrance of the moment that Babo pursued the fleeing Benito Cereno into the Americans' boat, “Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say: since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words” (*BC* 107). “Babo was not able to convince any of his white oppressors of his humanity by demonstrating it in action; how can or could he possibly do so with speech?”³⁰

This reading of *Benito Cereno* suggests that Douglass's narrative falls short of showing the reality of the peril that slavery represents for the South and thus the rest of the Union. Perhaps Melville achieves what Douglass promised in his slumbering volcano speech, but conceals in *Heroic Slave*: the slumbering volcano, when it erupts, is not likely to be dignified and self-controlled, but full of rage and vengeance. And even if it were self-controlled, as Babo's conduct is for all its seeming brutality, the prejudice that meets black self-assertion is deeply rooted and resistant even to clear evidence. Douglass is, on this account, perhaps too sanguine about the persuasive potential of heroic deeds and rhetorical leadership. Douglass's account of the *Creole* uprising is too tame to teach either slaves or slaveholders the real peril of

²⁹ Catherine H. Zuckert, “Leadership—Natural and Conventional—in Melville's *Benito Cereno*,” *Interpretation* 26, no. 2 (1998): 250.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

resorting to violence. Douglass would reconcile the northern abolitionist and the antislavery moderate to violent resistance by appealing to the example of 1776 and the success of the *Creole* uprising. Melville, however, would caution northern Democrats and white moderates about the danger of closing their eyes to the instability and explosiveness of the South's decaying system of racial caste. As Delano reflects during his stay aboard the Spanish slaver, calculating the possibility of a "piratical" subterfuge involving hidden Spanish sailors in the hold waiting to spring forth as they prepared to come alongside his own New England vessel, "Upon gaining that vicinity, might not the *San Dominick*, like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid?" (BC 58). Moreover, he would caution militant abolitionists and free black advocates of slave revolt against a course so likely to implicate them in atrocity or, even assuming an uprising conducted in a civilized fashion, against the distant hope that persuasive oratory and heroic deeds will win them honor or recognition from their countrymen.

At the same time, it is important to note that there are elements of Melville's narrative that suggest the prospects for violent self-assertion are not altogether dismal. Over against the concern that violence is inconsistent with dignified self-restraint, we have seen that Babo shows considerable restraint in carrying out his fictional role as Don Benito's servant and persuades the other blacks to stick to their assigned roles. He even retains his dignity after his capture, refusing either to beg for his life or to lash out in futile resistance. Like the great Atufal, the chained character in Babo's production whom Delano had admired for his "royal" demeanor (BC 51-52), Babo will not give his captors the satisfaction of prostrating himself. Melville pays subtle tribute to his dignity when he depicts Babo's head on the spike in Lima where "unabashed, he met the gaze of the whites" (BC 107). This dignity stands in contrast to the cowardice evident in Don Benito's inability even to look at Babo during his trial. One imagines that some in Melville's audience would see this contrast as the result of psychological torture, but a reader more sympathetic to the plight of the slaves would see in it shame on Don Benito's part and dignity (Douglass would say self-respect) on Babo's. As he tells Amasa Delano, "the Negro" has cast a shadow upon him, and he does not have the strength of mind or of character to recover (BC 107). If, as is commonly assumed, Melville intends to analogize the decaying aristocracy of the *San Dominick* and of Don Benito with the decaying racial caste system of the South, then the slave's prospects of walking away with dignity and self-respect are better than the slaveholder's.

Additionally, we should consider Babo’s example from the perspective of rhetorical leadership. While he does not deliver eloquent speeches in the heroic style of Madison Washington, Babo does put on a dramatic production for Amasa Delano that has a poetic character. He conceives of a character not only for himself to play, but also for others, planning and directing beforehand their speeches and actions. It was highly persuasive. When he first boards the ship, Delano entertains the notion that the story of the *San Dominick*’s misfortunes is a subterfuge by Don Benito. But he dismisses the notion precisely on the ground that such a well-orchestrated ruse is preposterous. “If Don Benito’s story was, throughout, an invention, then every soul on board, down to the youngest negress, was his carefully drilled recruit in the plot: an incredible inference” (BC 58). It never occurs to him that the diminutive and seemingly servile Babo has done just this with the help of the thrice-shackled giant Atufal. The plot unravels only because of Don Benito’s desperate action, not because of any penetration or perceptiveness on Delano’s part. It is plausible to see in this Melville’s hope that poetic speech, like his own, might persuade his reader to see the real peril of the slave question and the humanity of the enslaved through the mist and fog of sectionalism and race prejudice.³¹

CONCLUSION

The advocate of violent self-assertion could find in Melville’s tale a three-fold warning regarding the perils of violence, the inadequacy of persuasive rhetoric, and the shortcomings of the would-be liberator’s audience. The use of violence by private persons is potentially perilous because the passions it evokes in those who resort to it—vengeance and hatred—are difficult to restrain, perhaps uncontrollable. The resort to violence thus necessarily risks involvement in atrocity. This seems to be the case because persuasive rhetoric is not an adequate remedy for the noxious passions aroused by the resort to violence. Even assuming the efficacy of rhetorical leadership as a constraint on the use of violence, the audience of this violent self-assertion by the oppressed—at least in the context of American slavery and the system of racial caste—will see in it only a demonstration of that animal rage that their prejudices teach them are natural to their inferiors. In either case, violent self-assertion is an essentially tragic course of action. Far from securing a recognition of the equal rights of a fellow man—much less a fellow

³¹ I am indebted to one of the journal’s anonymous reviewers for the substance of this observation.

American—private violence potentially deepens and confirms the prejudices of the oppressor and the inferior status of the oppressed.

Perhaps most important is the common ground between Douglass and Melville. Both of their accounts impress on their readers a great moral seriousness about the use of violence. Though in his own speeches Douglass was reluctant to condemn any act of self-assertion by an enslaved person—even to the point of overlooking the atrocities of Nat Turner—his own carefully selected model for effective slave revolt argued for violence constrained by a strict regard for the moral standards of a civilized society. Madison Washington's example will not countenance bloodletting as an act of vengeance or excuse brutality on the ground of holy rage. Both the motive and the means of a violent act must comport with the self-respect and moral rectitude of a free and honorable person. The successful insurrectionist must act in such a way as to win not merely physical freedom but admiration from honorable men. Their conduct is itself a vindication of their equal title to natural rights. Douglass insists that black men's words, brigaded with their deeds, can change minds. That was the import of Douglass's autobiographies and lectures, and of his prescient advocacy of black enlistments in the Union Army. Man is perhaps beholden to passions and prejudices, but any advocate of republican self-government must aver that he is not slave to them. Reason and conscience have a claim on him as well. And, Douglass contends, nothing argues quite so eloquently for the proposition that black men share in reason and conscience as the honorable use of violence in defense of themselves and their neighbors. While for Melville the use of private violence is potentially tragic, for Douglass it may be essential, at least in the exceptional context of American slavery.

Socrates's Political Legacy: Xenophon's Socratic Characters in *Hellenica* I and II

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Abstract: This essay seeks to illuminate and interpret Xenophon's portrayal of active Socratic politics in the first part of the *Hellenica* by means of analyses of three characters associated with Socrates. First, I review the speeches and deeds of the two figures who are presented elsewhere by Xenophon as having been Socratic pupils, Alcibiades and Critias. Next, I offer a close reading of the only passage in the *Hellenica* featuring an explicit mention of Socrates, Eurypotemus's defense of the Arginusae generals. I argue that these three figures exemplify three different ways to put Socratic insight to work in the political realm—as a general, as a tyrant, and as an orator—and that each is beset by characteristic difficulties and un-Socratic errors of thought or judgment.

Is the idea of a “Socratic political life” oxymoronic? The Platonic Socrates is known for his public investigations of penetrating political questions and his defense of a philosophic utopia, but he famously abstained from participation in Athenian political life. Socrates's philosophic life, to the extent it was guided or motivated by the question of how a human being ought to live, involved the contemplation of political things but did not culminate in any unqualified endorsement of political activity. But if Socrates thought his own life was best lived in the shadow of Athenian politics, his pupils tended to find their way into the spotlight—either because they could not live up to the standard of their teacher, or because they came to disagree with his practical philosophic conclusions, or else because they believed some differences between the circumstances of Socrates's life and their own called for different courses of action on the basis of fundamentally shared philosophic insights. Yet one can hardly study Socratic political philosophy without wondering

how and how well the comprehensive view of politics purportedly offered by Socratic inquiry actually prepared the student for navigating the stormy seas of Athenian democracy.

Xenophon's *Hellenica* offers an opportunity for the exploration of this question. A military and political history of Greece that appears to pick up the thread of Thucydides's narrative, the *Hellenica* is Xenophon's only non-Socratic work (aside from the *Anabasis*)¹ that mentions Socrates and recounts the political deeds of characters who, elsewhere in Xenophon's works, appear to have learned from Socrates—most notably, Critias and Alcibiades. Do these characters carry some Socratic wisdom with them into the pages of the *Hellenica*? And if so, can we discern Xenophon's judgment of their statesmanship and thus of what would be a "Socratic politics"? Juxtaposed with the (mis)deeds of these Socratics manqués is the oration of Euryptolemus, which follows Xenophon's only explicit reference to Socrates in the *Hellenica*.² We approach Alcibiades, Critias, and Euryptolemus as ostensibly offering three distinct possibilities for how one might attempt to guide oneself through the perilous world of Athenian politics by the light of some Socratic insight: as a general, as a tyrant, and as an orator.³

¹ In this sense, the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica* form an important pair within Xenophon's corpus. Eric Buzzetti, *Xenophon the Socratic Prince: The Argument of the "Anabasis of Cyrus"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), provides an impressive exegesis of the former work along some of the same lines I will attempt to follow, though in a comparatively much abbreviated manner (treating only the first two books), with respect to the latter.

² It should be made clear in the case of Euryptolemus that there is no evidence of his having known or learned from Socrates. One might even wonder whether he is not a character of Xenophon's own invention. We examine his speech in the *Hellenica*, then, not because he represents a concrete example of "Socrates's political legacy," but because Xenophon insists, by his juxtaposition of Euryptolemus with Socrates, that any study of the Socratic elements of the whole work must attend to this passage with special care.

³ Strong cases could be made for the inclusion of other events and characters in a study of Socratic themes in these sections of *Hellenica*, but they cannot be treated in a discussion of such limited scope as this. Particularly noteworthy are Theramenes, who reminds of Socrates by his opposition to the tyranny of the Thirty (discussed below), including his citation of their treatment of Leon of Salamis (2.3.39), and by the scene of his death (2.3.55–56; see John Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times* [London: Routledge, 1995], 151–58 and Vivienne Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's "Hellenica"* [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989], 26–28, and cf. Diodorus Siculus 14.5.1–4, Pseudo-Plutarch, *Life of Isocrates*), and his fellow trierarch Thrasybulus, who inaugurates the restoration of traditional Athenian democracy after the civil war by an "invocation of the Delphic charge to 'know thyself' famously associated with Socrates" (Bernard J. Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded: Xenophon's Political History in the *Hellenica*," *Polis* 26, no. 2 [2009]: 330). Paul Ludwig, "Xenophon as a Socratic Reader of Thucydides," in *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*, ed. Ryan K. Balot, Sara Forsdyke, and Edith Foster (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 515–30, and Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," should be consulted for observations on these and other Socratic elements of the *Hellenica* passed over in this essay.

Opinions differ, however, as to whether the *Hellenica* can shed any light on the question of Socratic political wisdom. Scholars were long beset by a terrible prejudice against Xenophon's Socratic-philosophic credentials, and the *Hellenica* in particular was seen as a paltry imitation of Thucydides, devoid of thoughtful reflection and too biased even to be useful as a source of historical information.⁴ The last half century, however, has given way to steadily growing appreciation of the *Hellenica* as a text of considerable artistic, didactic, and historiographic merit.⁵ At the outset of this resurgence of interest, it was Leo Strauss who argued more insistently than anyone before or since that the perspective Xenophon adopts in the *Hellenica* can only be understood in light of the impact Socratic philosophy had on his thought.⁶ If Strauss is right, there can be little doubt that Xenophon has portrayed the characters in the *Hellenica* whose careers were influenced by Socrates with that crucial fact in mind or that the sole mention of Socrates in the work, which is followed by the oration of Euryptolemus, is of great significance.⁷

⁴ The first and most famous critic of this type was probably B. G. Niebuhr, "Über Xenophons Hellenika," *Rheinisches Museum* 1 (1827): 194–98 (cf. Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* [South Bend, IN: Saint Augustine's, 1998], 179), but there were many others. See George Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 8 (London: John Murray, 1850), 155; J. B. Bury, *The Ancient Greek Historians* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 86; Malcolm MacLaren Jr., "On the Composition of Xenophon's *Hellenica*," *American Journal of Philology* 55, no. 2 (1934): 250; W. P. Henry, *Greek Historical Writing* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1966), 1–3, 53–54; Christos C. Patsavos, "Thucydides and Xenophon as Historians," *Social Science* 45, no. 4 (1970): 210–11. Other critics are well reviewed by Christopher Tuplin, *The Failings of Empire* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), 12–14.

⁵ See, e.g., Ludwig, "Xenophon as a Socratic Reader," 518–59; Sarah Brown Ferrario, "Historical Agency and Self-Awareness in Xenophon's *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*," in *Xenophon: Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry*, ed. Fiona Hobden and Christopher Tuplin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 343; Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 316–18; Frances Pownall, *Lessons from the Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 65–66; Tim Rood, "Xenophon and Diodorus: Continuing Thucydides," in *Xenophon and His World*, ed. Christopher Tuplin (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004), 341–48, 390, 357–59; Vivienne Gray, "Interventions and Citations in Xenophon, *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*," *Classical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (May 2003): 111; Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 3–5; Tuplin, *Failings of Empire*, 11–18; Gray, "Continuous History and Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1–2.3.10," *American Journal of Philology* 112, no. 2 (1991): 202; Bodil Due, "The Return of Alcibiades in *Hellenica* I.IV, 8–23," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 42 (1991): 39; Peter Krentz, *Xenophon: Hellenika I–II.3.10* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1989), 6–8; Gray, *Character of Xenophon's "Hellenica"*, viii, 180; Gerald Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta: An Introduction* (Boston: Brill, 1987), 3; W. E. Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1977), 99–102; Henry, *Greek Historical Writing*, 191–93.

⁶ Leo Strauss, "Greek Historians," *Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 4 (1968): 663.

⁷ *Hellenica* scholars generally persuaded by Strauss's interpretation of Xenophon naturally gravitate to this position (see Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 316–18, 330–31; Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, 23–25, 52, 63, 72–73; Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian*, 21–22, 127), but cf. Robin Waterfield, "Xenophon's Socratic Mission," in Tuplin, *Xenophon and His World*, 79–80; Gray, "Continuous History and Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1–2.3.10," 6–7; Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 7–9, and Jean Luccioni, *Les idées politiques et sociales de Xénophon* (Paris: Ophrys, 1947), 21, for articulations

For our purposes, however, it is not necessary to resolve the question whether the *Hellenica* must be understood in the context of Xenophon's Socratism. The broad agreement in contemporary scholarship that has restored to the *Hellenica* its status as a thoughtfully written work, carefully ordered for the sake of educating the patient and diligent reader, is enough to justify the hypothesis that its characters have been portrayed so as to reflect any commonalities Xenophon considered significant. And Xenophon has elsewhere emphasized the importance of the Socratic common denominator shared by Critias's and Alcibiades's political careers.⁸ In the second chapter of his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon defends Socrates against the accusation that "both Critias and Alcibiades did the greatest evils to the city after having become Socrates's associates" (1.2.12). The examination of Critias and Alcibiades in the *Hellenica* below is informed by Xenophon's complex response to this charge, of which, however, we emphasize here only the two most important and relevant features.⁹ First, Xenophon portrays both Alcibiades and Critias in the *Memorabilia* as having acquired shockingly critical or dismissive views of traditional, democratic, Athenian law (1.2.39–46, 1.2.29–38). Second, Xenophon says explicitly he does not oppose (*ouk antilegō*) those who charge that Socrates should not have taught his associates "the political things" before teaching them to be moderate (1.2.17). To be sure, Xenophon argues in the *Memorabilia* that the faults of Alcibiades and Critias reflect their *failure* to follow the course of Socratic education, which had held the only possibility of their successful reform. It is not our purpose here, however, to consider the details of the (probably quite different) relationships between Socrates and these pupils in the course of which he taught them "the political things," but rather to consider whether and how those teachings eventually manifested themselves in the understandings and decisions of the mature political actors.

of similar notions without reference to Strauss's judgment on the matter. Rood ("Xenophon and Diodorus") stands out as an author who is both sharply critical of Strauss (342n5, 379n93) and recognizes the significance of Socrates's enigmatic appearance (379).

⁸ Gabriel Danzig shares the view that Xenophon cannot have portrayed Alcibiades and Critias in the *Hellenica* without thinking of their connection to Socrates ("The Use and Abuse of Critias: Conflicting Portraits in Plato and Xenophon," *Classical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 [2014]: 517). For a more general argument for the need to read Xenophon intertextually, see Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 5–9.

⁹ For a fuller treatment of Socrates's instruction of Alcibiades and Critias, see Thomas Pangle, *The Socratic Way of Life: Xenophon's "Memorabilia"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 26–28, 31–37; Gabriel Danzig, "Alcibiades versus Pericles: Apologetic Strategies in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*," *Greece & Rome* 61, no. 7 (2014): 7–28; Danzig, "Use and Abuse of Critias," 515–16; Vivienne Gray, *Xenophon's Mirror of Princes: Reading the Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 251–54; Louis-André Dorion, *Xenophon Mémorables*, vol. 1 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2000), clx–clxix; Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, 12–15; Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 151–52.

ALCIBIADES AND CRITIAS

Xenophon's portrayal of Alcibiades's tactical and strategic acumen in military affairs invites us to conclude that his quick decision-making, commanding manner, tactical cunning, and rhetorical ability are responsible for Athens's early successes in the *Hellenica*.¹⁰ Hundreds of ships (1.1.7–8, 13) lumber toward a chaotic draw in the Battle of Abydus until Alcibiades, arriving with eighteen ships, scores a decisive victory. After a month of imprisonment in Sardis, Alcibiades orchestrates his escape, somehow gets together “five triremes and a skiff,” and, having made rendezvous with the Athenians, begins to give orders to the other generals (1.1.9–13). He is in total command of the fleet, and seems to be the only admiral who appreciates the importance of stealth: among other measures, Alcibiades “proclaims death as the penalty for anyone caught sailing” away from his camp at Proconnesus, “so that no one could inform the enemy of the number of their ships” (1.1.15; see also 1.1.13, 17).¹¹ By contrast, the fighting that takes place without Alcibiades seems hopelessly clumsy (1.1.1–6, 2.1–11, 5.12–14, 6.13–23, 33ff.). Every move Alcibiades makes is a coup. He sees through the Chalcedonians' attempt to hide their money in Bithynia (1.3.2–3), and his care to extend the wall around Chalcedon to the river proves decisive in taking the city (1.3.4, 7). It is Alcibiades's cunning and adaptability to circumstances that deliver Byzantium to the Athenians by fraud when force proves inadequate (1.3.16, 20).

But is Alcibiades's well-honed knack for tactics and strategy particularly Socratic?¹² As we know from the *Memorabilia*, Alcibiades's Socratic education was a somewhat delicate matter for Socrates's supporters, since it contributed to capital charges being laid against him. By writing both the *Memorabilia* and the *Hellenica*, Xenophon takes a risk that Plato did not allow himself: he shows Alcibiades as a pupil of Socrates in one place, and in his political activity in another. The Alcibiades of the *Hellenica* has learned that ruling requires a combination of force and persuasion (1.3.16). In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates suggests that a general, in addition to having tactical know-how, must be “both friendly and cruel, both simple and treacherous, both protective and

¹⁰ Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, 1–9; Ludwig, “Xenophon as a Socratic Reader,” 517; cf. Strauss, “Greek Historians,” 664; Due, “Return of Alcibiades,” 39–40; Rood, “Xenophon and Diodorus,” 366.

¹¹ Compare this with the decisive failure of the other generals noted by Alcibiades at Aegospotami (2.1.25). I have mainly consulted E. C. Marchant's Oxford Classical Texts edition of the Greek of the *Hellenica*. Translations into English are generally my own, though I have made regular reference to the translation of John Marincola in Strassler's Landmark edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009).

¹² Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 27–38, sees some Socratic influence in the emphasis Xenophon puts on Alcibiades's and other leaders' ability to instill order (*taxis*).

a thief, lavish and rapacious, gift-giving and greedy, cautious and ready to attack” (3.1.6). The political upshot of what is Socratic in Alcibiades, then, may be on display more in what he says at Proconnesus than in what he does at Cyzicus, more at Byzantium than at Chalcedon.¹³ But this also means that what Alcibiades has been enabled (though perhaps not encouraged) to do by Socrates will sometimes fall beneath the bar of “things worthy of being remembered,” which Xenophon appears to have set for himself throughout the *Hellenica*.¹⁴ In what follows, then, we look not only at what is most striking in Alcibiades’s deeds, but also at that about which Xenophon is more reticent.

Alcibiades’s most momentous decision is indeed presented by Xenophon with baffling indifference. After the battle of Notion, Alcibiades makes what seems to be his only mistake in the *Hellenica* by trusting command of the fleet to a subordinate who, directly disobeying Alcibiades’s orders, engages Lysander’s fleet and loses fifteen triremes in the battle (1.11.12–14)—no insignificant loss, but nothing compared to the gains Alcibiades has won. Yet the fickle Athenian demos blames Alcibiades for the setback and elects a new set of generals (1.5.16). Alcibiades’s subsequent desertion of the Athenian navy is described in fewer than twenty words: “So Alcibiades, being treated poorly even within the army, took one trireme and sailed to his fortress in the Chersonese” (1.5.17). Alcibiades disappears as suddenly as he had arrived, and Xenophon at first gives very little indication as to why he decides to leave. But Xenophon juxtaposes Alcibiades’s departure with the events surrounding the Battle of Arginusae, after which the victorious Athenian generals are tried and sentenced to death en masse for failing to rescue their stranded comrades, or to recover their corpses, in stormy seas. It seems Alcibiades correctly interpreted the rumblings of the demos, audible even among his soldiers, as an ominous indication of its mood.¹⁵ His defection may (yet again) have saved his life.

¹³ Here I refer to the *Memorabilia* to help illuminate what is Socratic in the *Hellenica*. Indeed, it would be too much to expect to learn about Socratic politics from the *Hellenica* alone. Rather, the *Hellenica* can help us to clarify and refine our hypotheses concerning Socratic politics formed elsewhere, as only depictions of political speeches and deeds could. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 19b3–20c3 and *Republic* 466d6ff.

¹⁴ See 4.8.1, and cf. *Anabasis* 5.8.26. Strauss suggests that the *Hellenica* is “devoted above all to the serious deeds of perfect gentleman” (“Greek Historians,” 662). For other accounts of the *Hellenica*’s unifying themes, see Gray, “Interventions and Citations,” 111ff.; Higgins, *Xenophon the Athenian*, 123–25; Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 241–49.

¹⁵ To say that the demos was fickle, in other words, is not to say that it acted unpredictably; its fickleness was a characteristic trait, as Alcibiades understood. Rood notes the foreboding signs Xenophon includes from the moment of Alcibiades’s return (“Xenophon and Diodorus,” 369).

The suggestion that Alcibiades cared little enough for the Athenians to be willing to abandon them in this way might seem to be at odds with the unforgettable scene of his triumphant homecoming in 407. Yet here, too, Xenophon's reticence with respect to Alcibiades's motives sends us hunting for clues. Alcibiades is simply said to "wish to sail home with the soldiers"—clearly he is still concerned that he will be received harshly (1.4.8, 11, 18). He is only willing to disembark at the Piraeus once he has seen his companions waiting for him (1.4.19), though he then stays for two months (1.4.21). It seems to be *only* for the sake of these "companions" (*epitēdeious*) that Alcibiades is willing to disembark and return to the city, and even then he comes protected by bodyguards (1.4.18). The cause of Alcibiades's trepidation is somewhat obscured by the fact that Xenophon spends twenty-one lines describing the arguments of those who welcomed Alcibiades back, and only three on his detractors: "others said that he alone had been the cause of their past evils, and that he alone risked becoming a bringer of fearful things to the city" (1.4.17).¹⁶ The prophetic character of their reported concern, however, directs us to what must in fact have been the most prominent feature of arguments among the Athenians against Alcibiades's return. Those in the city who believe that he was truly guilty of impiety must fear that his return will bring a pollution to the city.¹⁷ But Alcibiades knows the Athenians well; their fear of him is matched by his of them. He has synchronized his visit with a religious festival on which "no one would dare to take up a serious deed" (1.4.12),¹⁸ and he makes several public speeches, not narrated by Xenophon, defending his piety (1.4.20). The *pièce de résistance* is Alcibiades's leading of the first procession to Eleusis by land since the Spartan occupation of Deceleia had made it too dangerous: aside from the fact that the Mysteries had already been performed earlier that year (1.4.20), it must be recalled that Alcibiades

¹⁶ Rood, "Xenophon and Diodorus," 368–69, surveys a number of possible explanations for this disproportion before suggesting for his own part that comparison with Thucydides's more balanced judgments helps us to see how sharply Alcibiades polarized Athenian opinion. Xenophon's reticence with respect to the Athenians' concern over Alcibiades's impiety seems of a piece with his relative silence on pious observance in the *Hellenica* up to the victory of the restored democracy over the Thirty at the end of Book 2. For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 327–31, and cf. Strauss, "Greek Historians," 663–64.

¹⁷ See Due, "Return of Alcibiades," 46–47, and cf. Gray, *Character of Xenophon's "Hellenica,"* 92. Cf. Thuc. 8.53.2.

¹⁸ Blaise Nagy, "Alcibiades' Second 'Profanation,'" *Historia* 43, no. 3 (1994): 275, 282–85, takes this coincidence to have been *unfortunate* for Alcibiades (see also Due, "Return of Alcibiades," 42), and rather outlandishly suggests that it was orchestrated by Alcibiades's enemies (see Frances Pownall, "Condemnation of the Impious in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," *Harvard Theological Review* 91, no. 3 [1998]: 262n74). He does not consider the possibility that the danger to Alcibiades is mitigated by the timing of his return. Cf. 4.4.2; Plato, *Phaedo* 58a6–c5.

had been exiled for profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries and had been the one to advise the Spartans to fortify Deceleia. Alcibiades understands the gravity and reverence demanded by Athenian piety. He knew he had to flee when the *Salaminia* came to retrieve him at Catana, and he knows he must assuage the pious fears of the Athenians upon his return.

To Alcibiades's apparent recognition of the need to address the demands of Athenian piety in this episode one might oppose his flippancy and disregard for the importance of the oaths to be sworn over the treaty following his victory at Chalcedon (1.3.8–12). In this case, as in many others, one concern of Alcibiades's appears to trump all others: the collection of money. From his very first words in the *Hellenica*, this is the most consistent feature of Xenophon's presentation of Alcibiades.¹⁹ Most astoundingly, Alcibiades is said to collect one hundred talents in a single trip to the Ceramic Gulf on his way back to Athens (1.4.8–9). Alcibiades naturally needs money to support his army, but this is in fact never emphasized: it is never said that Alcibiades pays his troops (cf. 1.2.17). Alcibiades's numerous and lucrative money-making expeditions (1.1.20, 3.8–11, 4.23; cf. 1.4.21), and the gaps in the narrative of his activities (1.4.11), naturally leap to mind when Xenophon casually announces that Alcibiades has his own fortress in the Chersonese to which he will retire (1.5.17).²⁰ Now, there is nothing Socratic about preoccupation with money, and Alcibiades is by no means a Socratic philosopher (*Memorabilia* 4.1.5; cf. Plato, *Alcibiades* 134b4–5). But he is clear-sighted about the precariousness of his situation: his safety in Athens is anything but certain given the nature of the crime for which he was exiled, and living without a homeland is eminently dangerous if one cannot provide for one's own protection.²¹ Alcibiades seems to know from the start that he must plan for the possibility of his separation from Athens. Dissembling may be required for the sake of money.

Alcibiades's motives may in some cases have been questionable, but Xenophon has not generally allowed him to sink beneath the bar of gentlemanliness. If, however, we take seriously the indication in the *Memorabilia* that Alcibiades is to be considered together with Critias, we find ourselves facing the most overtly ungentlemanly character in the *Hellenica*, the leader of the Spartan-sponsored oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants that ruled for a short,

¹⁹ 1.1.12, 14, 20–22; 3.2–4, 8; 4.8–9. See also Proietti, *Xenophon's Sparta*, 6–7; Due, "Return of Alcibiades," 40.

²⁰ The suggestion emerges later that some Athenian money from the Hellespont, where Alcibiades had established a strategically located custom house (1.1.22), has gone missing (1.7.1).

²¹ *Memorabilia* 2.1.14, *Anabasis* 7.8.1; cf. Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 387–421.

bloody period after Athens's defeat.²² His disposition and preoccupations are quite different from Alcibiades's. Alcibiades spends only two months in Athens in the *Hellenica*, and those mysteriously, whereas Critias is at home until his regime begins to fall. Accordingly, Xenophon's Alcibiades does not seem particularly eager to *rule* (at home) so much as to *command* (on campaign), whereas Critias is obviously hungry for political power over a polis. Thus, of all Critias's failings, his performance as a military leader is the matter in which he compares least favorably to Alcibiades. He appears to have neither the grasp of tactical theory nor the ability to earn the valuable trust and devotion of the ruled that are the hallmarks of good Xenophontic leadership. He makes use almost exclusively of (Spartan) mercenaries, both as bodyguards and as soldiers, and strips the majority of the Athenians of their arms (2.3.14, 20, 2.3.42). In his attack on the rebels at Phyle, he is unable to control his hot-headed young soldiers (cf. 2.3.23) and loses valuable personnel to defection (2.4.2–3). The cavalry he thereafter sends to accompany the Spartan garrison is disorganized, lacking in stealth, and quick to flee (2.4.5–6). Critias dies in battle, leading an army on a road too narrow to make use of his superior numbers, apparently without any light-armed troops at all, up a hill (2.4.10–12, 15–16, 19).

But whereas Alcibiades hardly speaks in the *Hellenica*, Critias has dialogues, legislates, and orates, and in this way gives us more to think about regarding questions of justice and government than Alcibiades has. In the opening of his speech condemning the moderate Theramenes, who has been increasingly critical of the extremist policies of the Thirty, Critias defends his government's excessive use of executions by pointing out that "these things always happen wherever regimes change" (2.3.24). This is typical of Critias's unswerving commitment to the use of force, however unpalatable or supported by deceit (2.3.23, 4.8), in the apparent belief that violence and terror are sufficient to accomplish all his ends. Indeed, Theramenes simply and correctly observes that the Thirty are establishing "the rule of violence" (2.19–20). But while Critias can certainly be malicious and vindictive (2.3.15, 21), his violence is far from mindless; his defense of harshness in the wake of revolution reflects his thinking on the question of what ruling requires. His central political insight is brought out by the following juxtaposition. When

²² It is generally agreed that Xenophon significantly exaggerates the monstrosity of Critias in the *Hellenica*, but scholars disagree as to why this is. See Danzig, "Use and Abuse of Critias," 514ff.; Frances Pownall, "Critias in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 31 (2012): 1–5; Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 159–63; Tuplin, *Failings of Empire*, 43–47; Martin Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 481–83.

Theramenes objects that it is unfair or unreasonable to kill those who are honored by the people, Critias responds that such killing is a necessary measure for the avaricious and that it is naive to think that the Thirty need to take any less care to protect their rule than a single tyrant (2.3.15–16). In response to Theramenes's later objection, that it is unjust to kill the innocent, Critias charges Theramenes with treason, and announces in his speech against him, "it seems to us to be extremely *just* that, if someone of our own harms this institution, he pay the penalty" (2.3.21, 26, emphasis added). Critias thinks of himself as a tyrant (cf. 2.4.1), and openly embraces aggressive acquisitiveness (*pleonexia*), but maintains a notion of justice: the mutual good faith that is as necessary to the success of a band of criminals as it is to a city.²³ According to this strictly utilitarian view of justice, the end of just collaboration is the acquisition of power and freedom to do what one pleases (2.3.13, 21, 23), and the danger (to oneself) of injustice extends no further than the threat of retribution from the human beings one betrays. Thus, the ruler must be willing to punish quickly and severely. Critias may appear monstrous, but he is a sophisticated monster.²⁴

Of course, Critias may be appealing to justice in his speech purely for rhetorical effect (cf. 2.3.33 with 16). Be that as it may, it is clear that he does not believe he has any obligation on account of justice either to piety or to law. The original purpose of the Thirty, as recognized by the demos (cf. 2.3.11), was for them to write down "the laws of the fatherland" for the postwar regime (2.3.2)—a task which they intentionally shirked, refusing to produce a published law code so as to reserve the greatest and most arbitrary power for themselves (2.3.11). On the one occasion when the "new laws" restrict him, namely, by making illegal the arbitrary execution of Theramenes, Critias, supported by multiple contingents of armed guards, publicly and unilaterally revokes Theramenes's citizenship and has him summarily killed (2.3.50–51, 55). We may say that Critias does not distinguish between law and the rule of force or that he sees the former as just a clumsy version of the latter (cf. *Memorabilia* 1.2.45).²⁵ But most shocking in the trial and execution of Theramenes

²³ Plato, *Republic* 351c–d; cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 83.

²⁴ Pownall, "Critias in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," argues that the negative portrayal of Critias is such as to make him less "ideological" than we know him to have been. My alternative suggestion is that something of what may be called his "ideology" is evident if one regards his speeches as perverted Socratic philosophy. See also Danzig, "Use and Abuse of Critias," 513–15; S. Usher, "Xenophon, Critias and Theramenes," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, no. 88 (1968): 132.

²⁵ Danzig, "Use and Abuse of Critias," 516, claims that the murder of Theramenes illustrates Critias's "hypocrisy," since he is breaking his own law, but this overlooks the consistency of Critias's view of law as such.

is Critias's total disregard of the defendant's plea for piety, having him torn from the hearth as he invokes the gods as witnesses (2.3.52–55). Critias is flagrantly impious.²⁶

In general, one can appreciate the subtlety of Alcibiades's understanding more by recognizing the failings of Critias's. Alcibiades prudently uses, caters to, and shows respect for Athenian piety. Critias preys on it: in an Odeion half-filled with armed troops, he forces what remains of the city of Athens to vote unanimously for the slaughter of the Eleusinians, so that the Athenians "share in the dangers" of the Thirty's tyrannical rule (2.4.9–10). Alcibiades has success in winning the loyalty of his troops (1.2.15); Critias, as Theramenes points out, only multiplies his enemies (2.3.41–44). And consider the contradiction between Critias's outrageous impiety in his dealing with Theramenes and the law in general, and his publicly avowed Spartophilia (2.3.34). It is hard to believe that Critias gives full due to the relative importance of piety in the constitution of the Lacedaemonians.²⁷ His reign of terror must surely be judged a failure. Ironically, Critias ends up almost as much without a city as Alcibiades, and though Xenophon only reveals it in the case of Critias, neither one was able to find safety on his own.

Critias is too power hungry, too retributive, too much a slave to his passions to be called Socratic, and we know that he and Socrates did not see eye to eye (*Memorabilia* 1.2.29–38). We may feel, given Xenophon's portrayal, that his allowing Socrates to live at all may have been a sign of a kind of friendship, but the fact remains that Socrates was harshly critical of Critias's lack of restraint, and Critias did not forget it.²⁸ Yet Critias is by no means unintelligent, and his violence is not haphazard. His behavior indicates a posture of extreme and nakedly cynical political realism, but it should surprise no one that cynicism is to be found among the many possible results of exposure to Socratic philosophy.

²⁶ For a similar observation, see Frances Pownall, "Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*: The Arginusae Episode," *Athenaeum* 88 (2000): 511. Cf. also Usher, "Xenophon, Critias and Theramenes," 131: "It is perhaps indicative of Critias' atheism that he never swears by the gods."

²⁷ Ostwald, *Popular Sovereignty*, 463–64, and Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 64–68, emphasize the Spartan influence on Critias's regime, but do not discuss his brazen impiety in this connection (see also Robin Seager, "Xenophon and Athenian Democratic Ideology," *Classical Quarterly* 51, no. 2 [2001]: 389). Danzig, "Use and Abuse of Critias," 522n56, is right to follow Dorion, *Xenophon Mémoires*, in seeing a kinship between Critias's regime and that of Plato's *Republic*, but both seem to confuse Plato's thought for his Socratic speeches. Cf. Pownall, "Critias in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 14–17.

²⁸ *Memorabilia* 1.2.31; Plato, *Letters* 324e.

The *Hellenica* certainly presents Alcibiades more favorably than it does Critias, but the similarities between them are suggestive of their parallel Socratic educations. Neither Alcibiades nor Critias places devotion to Athens or to Athenian law above what he sees as his own good, and, partially as a result, neither one of them is checked by pious fear. But where Critias is outrageous in his disregard for the gods, Alcibiades sees that it is best to cater to the Athenians' piety, on account either of a deeper understanding of political psychology, or lessons learned from previous mistakes, or both. Accordingly, Alcibiades is more concerned than Critias to persuade those he rules or to rule through persuasion. Especially given Xenophon's presentation in the *Memorabilia*, it is safe to say that Alcibiades is as aware as Critias of the ruler's need to use law as a tool, but Alcibiades appears to understand more deeply that law is most effective when it is embraced by those it governs. This recognition gives to Alcibiades's deeds in the *Hellenica* a crucial measure of circumspection and makes him, at least according to Xenophon's presentation, more able to find safety in the end. But the ultimate *failure* of both Alcibiades and Critias in the *Hellenica* is an important shared feature of their undertakings. Neither one gets what he wants, and it must finally be said that it is precisely what each wants, the *ends* of his striving, that represents his definitive flaw from the point of view of Socratic philosophy.

THE APOLOGY OF EURYPTOLEMUS FOR THE GENERALS

The Athenians' naval victory in the massive Battle of Arginusae (406 BC) was marred by the deaths of thousands of Athenians left stranded in a storm on some twenty-five disabled ships (1.6.35).²⁹ The Athenian assembly infamously condemned to death the eight generals responsible for the fleet by a single vote, and Socrates's opposition to this allegedly illegal procedure is recorded by Plato and Xenophon as evidence of his noble lawfulness and piety.³⁰ In the *Hellenica*, however, Xenophon confines Socrates's involvement to a single sentence: "The Prytanes, being fearful, all agreed to put it to a vote, except for Socrates son of Sophroniscus; he said that he would do everything in no other way than according to law" (1.7.15). Xenophon thus appears to signal that Socrates's deed on this occasion bears little if any emphasis from the point of view of the *Hellenica*.³¹

²⁹ For the estimate of the number of dead, see Debra Hamel, *The Battle of Arginusae* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 54; Peter Krentz, "The Arginusai Affair," in Strassler, *The Landmark Hellenica*, 319.

³⁰ *Apology of Socrates* 32b1–5; *Memorabilia* 1.1.18, 4.4.2.

³¹ Cf. David H. Thomas, "Chronological Problems in the Continuation of Xenophon's *Hellenika*," in

But Socrates's enigmatic appearance is more important than its brevity would suggest. In the preceding pages, Callixenus and Theramenes (the trierarch who had been ordered to save the shipwrecked sailors) whip up public opinion against the generals and push through a motion to have them tried by a single vote of the assembly (1.7.4, 12–13).³² Callixenus incites the Athenians to intimidate any potential dissenters into silence, and Xenophon's portrayal of the multitude shouting "that it is terrible if someone will not allow the demos to do whatever it wishes" (1.7.13–14) provokes Krentz to suggest that, on this occasion, "Athenian democracy reached perhaps its most extreme moment."³³ It is here that Xenophon inserts his mention of Socrates, and immediately thereafter follows Euryptolemus's long, uninterrupted appeal to the assembly, as if Socrates had parted the cacophonous sea of the angry demos with a single phrase. Euryptolemus is thereby linked to Socrates more explicitly than any other character in the book, and an examination of his speech—and thus of a version of the argument Socrates made on this occasion—is indispensable to the present study.³⁴

Strassler, *The Landmark Hellenica*, 4.7; Rood, "Xenophon and Diodorus," 379; Strauss, "Greek Historians," 663.

³² On Theramenes's motivation, see Diodorus Siculus 13.101–3, and see Mable L. Lang, "Theramenes and Arginousai," *Hermes* 120, no. 3 (2009): 267–77; A. Andrewes, "The Arginousai Trial," *Phoenix* 28, no. 1 (1974): 112–13.

³³ Krentz, "The Arginousai Affair," 317. Dustin Gish contends that the ubiquitous view of Xenophon's presentation as critical of the demos is the result of a long misunderstanding ("Defending *Dēmokratia*: Athenian Justice and the Trial of the Arginusae Generals in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," in Hobden and Tuplin, *Xenophon: Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry*, 161–63). Though he argues persuasively that the trial and execution of the generals was neither uncharacteristic of direct democracy nor clearly unconstitutional, I believe Gish risks equating what is characteristic and legal with what is sound or assuming that the demos must have been acting to protect its sovereign authority (see, e.g., 175–76, 182–83). Even if Xenophon has been misunderstood since antiquity by those who fail to question whether the action of the demos was truly illegal—and this is certainly possible—it would strain credulity to deny that Xenophon meant to portray the Athenians here as crossing the nebulous line separating lawfulness and democracy from compulsion and tyranny (cf. *Memorabilia* 1.2.39–46). See also the related but more limited arguments of Luca A. Asmonti, "The Arginusae Trial, the Changing Role of *Strategoí* and the Relationship between Demos and Military Leadership in Late-Fifth Century Athens," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 49 (2006): 1–21, Peter Hunt, "The Slaves and the Generals of Arginusae," *American Journal of Philology* 122, no. 3 (2001): 359–80, and Seager, "Xenophon and Athenian Democratic Ideology," 396. For a related critique of Gish, see Pownall, "Condemnation of the Impious in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 263. Rood suggests that Xenophon agrees with Thucydides here by indicating that extreme democracy is tyrannical ("Xenophon and Diodorus," 377–79).

³⁴ Henry was the first to note Socrates's apparent impact on the assembly (*Greek Historical Writing*, 198; cf. Strauss, "Greek Historians," 658). See also Gish, "Defending *Dēmokratia*," 186, Pownall, "Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 507, Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 184–88, and Bodil Due, "The Trial of the Generals in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 34 (1983): 41ff. Dobski identifies the defense of law-abidingness as the key connection between Socrates's action and Euryptolemus's subsequent speech ("Athenian Democracy Refounded," 331–34).

Having ascended to the speaker's platform, Euryptolemus begins his speech, "I have ascended here in some respects to accuse, O men of Athens, Pericles, though he is my relative and companion, and Diomedon, though he is my friend, and in other respects to make a defense on their behalf, and in still other respects to give counsel as to what things seem to me to be best for the whole city" (1.7.16). We are thus led to expect that the speech will consist of three parts: accusation, defense, counsel. In the speech itself, the order of the last two portions is reversed.³⁵

1. ACCUSATION

Euryptolemus's proposed procedure of preceding his defense with accusations against the very people he is defending suggests that, as he will emphasize later (1.7.21), his speech is not motivated by self-interest (i.e., by the desire to help his friends and relatives), but rather by his desire to furnish the city with the best possible counsel.³⁶ Hence his professed belief that he must accuse even his relatives when the truth demands it. The accusation against Pericles and Diomedon itself, however, turns out to be quite innocuous, if not quite exonerating. Euryptolemus blames these two for having persuaded the other generals *not* to send a letter after the battle clarifying to the Athenians that Theramenes and Thrasybulus had been ordered to lead the rescue mission and had failed (1.7.17). Euryptolemus apparently disapproves of the imprudence of these two generals in particular, who failed to defend their own innocence and that of their fellow generals by laying the blame, in writing, upon the more truly culpable.

The cause of Pericles's and Diomedon's imprudence, according to Euryptolemus, was their "philanthropy" (1.7.18).³⁷ They preferred to allow Theramenes and Thrasybulus to avoid coming to harm if possible. On the surface, then, Euryptolemus's "accusation" appears little more than a cheap rhetorical trick, a sort of praise by faint damning. But he also conveys what may be a

My own analysis culminates in conclusions rather complementary to Dobski's; I indicate some differences of detail and emphasis in the notes below.

³⁵ Dobski proposes an alternative, four-part division of Euryptolemus's oration ("Athenian Democracy Refounded," 331).

³⁶ Seager, "Xenophon and Athenian Democratic Ideology," 389, suggests that this avowal was demanded by democratic principle.

³⁷ Gray, *Character of Xenophon's "Hellenica,"* makes *philanthrōpia* the key to Euryptolemus's speech (86–91); cf. Due, "Return of Alcibiades," 44–45, 51–53, who suggests that Gray exaggerates philanthropy's importance in the *Hellenica*. See also Pownall, "Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 508.

legitimate critique of these two generals. They allowed their hope that no one would have to be punished for the misfortune at Arginusae to deprive them of an opportunity to protect themselves. By refusing to exculpate themselves in writing (by incriminating Theramenes and Thrasybulus), Pericles and Diomedon were left vulnerable to Theramenes's slanderous demagoguery. Euryptolemus's "accusation" thus directs the following censure at those he is in fact defending: one must not underestimate, out of philanthropic hopefulness, the Athenian demos's need to mete out punishment for the losses it suffers—a lesson that Alcibiades appeared to have learned quite well.³⁸ Those who are unwilling to defend themselves at the expense of others will soon find themselves under attack.

2. COUNSEL

Euryptolemus's counsel to the Athenians, which follows his brief and mostly innocuous "accusation," is the longest part of his speech and contains the clearest echo of the Socratic statement that inaugurated it. Socrates, with his only utterance in the *Hellenica*, insisted that everything he does must be in accordance with law. Euryptolemus's advice to the Athenians, in brief, is that the fate of the generals must not be decided without due process of law. When Xenophon elsewhere cites this occasion as evidence of Socrates's justice (*Memorabilia* 4.4.2), he goes on to recount a conversation between Socrates and Hippias in which Socrates defends the thesis that the just is the lawful and is ordained by the gods. Euryptolemus is in no position to present a dialectical demonstration of this sort as a justification for his appeal to lawfulness. He must rather, as he has promised, persuade the Athenians that what he proposes is "best for the whole city," i.e., that it is better for them to rule by law than to rule tyrannically.³⁹

Yet his pitch for the supremacy of lawfulness *does* rely upon the very intuitions or presumptions concerning law that Socrates purports to demonstrate to Hippias in the *Memorabilia*. Euryptolemus says he wishes to persuade the Athenians to do "the just and holy things" so as to avoid "committing the greatest errors against both the gods and [themselves]" (1.7.19). The Athenians would be committing such an error, he claims, if they were to punish someone guiltless, and it is for this reason that they should give each general

³⁸ Cf. Rood, "Xenophon and Diodorus," 369 and 379.

³⁹ See Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 332–33, for the argument that this artful identification of law-abidingness with advantage for the Athenians as key to understanding Euryptolemus's speech (332–33).

his own full, public trial (1.7.19, 23). Euryptolemus is able to assert that the lawful procedure is *holy* without difficulty by appealing to the pious obedience owed by the citizens to the laws of their fatherland (1.7.25).⁴⁰ His attempt to show that the lawful procedure he proposes is necessarily *just* is more problematic. The purpose of allowing each general the right to make a full defense in court, Euryptolemus implies, is to ensure that the Athenians “can be deceived neither by [Euryptolemus] nor by anyone else,” so that they can “with knowledge punish those who did injustice” (1.7.19). The Athenians will be able to sort out all the facts in the course of the generals’ individual trials and thus be guaranteed to punish only the wrongdoers, while “the blameless will be set free by you, O Athenians, and not be unjustly destroyed” (1.7.24). By contrast, if the generals are tried as a group by the assembly, demagogues could persuade the people to lump the innocent in with the guilty in ignorant haste. But are the Athenians not at least as likely to be deceived by a tricky speaker in court as they are by an orator in the assembly? Whatever it means to say that the rule of law ensures just *procedures*, there can be no guarantee that such procedures will produce just *outcomes* (cf. *Memorabilia* 4.8.5). Euryptolemus blurs that distinction in order to argue that adherence to legal procedure will prevent any miscarriage of justice. Attention to the weaknesses of his argument leads to a critique of law as such.⁴¹

But Euryptolemus’s proposal will not be complete unless he can persuade the crowd that it should *want* to proceed justly, i.e., that it is good or advantageous for them to do so. It is telling that his first move in this direction is to assure them that they will be free to inflict harsh punishments on whomever should lawfully be found guilty, invoking the arcane Decree of Cannonus, according to which “if someone does injustice to the Athenian demos, he is to defend himself before the demos in chains, and if he is judged guilty of doing injustice, he is to be killed by being thrown into the pit,” and so forth (1.7.20).⁴² Though he also mentions a less obscure and less gruesome option, which surprisingly omits the death penalty (1.7.22), Euryptolemus ultimately proposes that the generals be tried separately according to the Decree of

⁴⁰ That is, to the “ephebic oath” sworn by all Athenian citizens; see Pownall, “Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon’s *Hellenica*,” 505–6.

⁴¹ Dobski also finds that close consideration of Euryptolemus’s speech reveals a critique of law, but it is a somewhat different critique: as noted above, Dobski’s approach stresses the relationship of lawfulness to advantage where I emphasize its relationship to justice (“Athenian Democracy Refounded,” 331–33).

⁴² Cf. Aristophanes, *Ekklesiazousae* 1090.

Cannonus (1.7.34). He recognizes the need to indulge the Athenians' punitive streak.

Euryptolemus's hope, then, rests on the prospect of tempering the Athenians' need for retributive justice, not of eliminating it.⁴³ He begins by urging the assembly to reflect on its retributive inclination: "What is it that you fear in acting so very hastily? Or is it that you will not be able to kill and set free whomever you wish if you should judge according to the law, but not so if [you judge] against the law?" (1.7.26). Confined to merely rhetorical questions, Euryptolemus diagnoses the Athenians' behavior as motivated by a sort of fear. It is the tyrant's fear, expressed in characteristically punitive anger, of encountering a limit to tyrannical power.⁴⁴ Euryptolemus's strategy is to fight fear with fear. He continues, "But perhaps if you kill someone who is not to blame, you will regret it later. Remember how painful and harmful this is, especially when you have erred in the death of human beings" (1.7.29). Against the assembly's fear that its sovereignty is being challenged (1.7.26; cf. 1.7.13), Euryptolemus opposes the assembly's fear of its own *hubris* (cf. 2.2.10). As much as the goodness of justice is seen by the Athenians to reside in their ability to make the guilty suffer, Euryptolemus knows that the fear of committing injustice and of the resulting pollution is an even greater inducement.⁴⁵ Hence, he has made the need to respect the impunity of the guiltless the keynote of his plea for lawfulness (1.7.19, 23–24, 29). The Athenians have deep misgivings regarding their not infrequent transgressions of the law; Euryptolemus's attempt to employ their fear as an antidote to the tyrannical anger of the demos is a testament to his understanding of what has made for some of the most dramatic vacillations of Athenian opinion and action throughout the course of the war.⁴⁶ His call for caution on these grounds marks the climax of the central portion of his oration and prepares his defense of the generals' innocence.

⁴³ As Dobski puts it, Euryptolemus assures the Athenians that they "can vent their spleen in a manner consistent with the law and with justice" ("Athenian Democracy Refounded," 332).

⁴⁴ On Xenophon's presentation of the demos as tyrannical, see Rood, "Xenophon and Diodorus," 377–79.

⁴⁵ Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," following pointers in Euryptolemus's speech, helpfully explores the psychology and rationality of this fear in its relationship to guilt and shame (332–33).

⁴⁶ E.g., in the case of the Mytilenian revolt (Thuc. 3.49). Rood discusses both Thucydides's and Xenophon's portrayals of this "volatility" in the Athenian demos throughout the war ("Xenophon and Diodorus," 378–79).

3. DEFENSE

Euryptolemus begins his defense by clarifying the details on the basis of which blame for the debacle following the battle might be apportioned more carefully: Diomedon had wanted the entire fleet to set out to rescue the stranded crews, whereas Erasinides had proposed that the stranded be left behind so that the fleet could sail to relieve the besieged Athenians at Mytilene; it was a third general, Thrasyllus, who proposed the compromise that was finally accepted, assigning Theramenes and Thrasybulus to lead a detachment of forty-seven ships in the rescue mission while the rest of the fleet headed to Mytilene under the generals' command (1.7.29–30). Euryptolemus suggests that it would be just for Theramenes and Thrasybulus to be held accountable for the failure of the rescue mission and the generals for their failure to pursue and attack the Spartan fleet, implying that the buck in question should stop with the two trierarchs and not with the generals who issued their orders (1.7.31). Accordingly, Euryptolemus hereafter speaks of two groups of commanders (the trierarchs and the generals) who failed to *carry out* their respective orders—he never again refers to the generals as having *issued* the orders (1.7.32–33). But he quickly drops the suggestion that Theramenes and Thrasybulus should stand trial. He seems more concerned to exonerate the generals than to blame (and thereby provoke) their subordinates.

But Euryptolemus knows that the demos must be allowed to vent its indignation, and his final proposal, to try the generals separately under the Decree of Cannonus, will enable this. His “defense” of the generals, then, if it is not seriously meant to persuade the Athenians to forgive them all, appears designed to protect his friend Diomedon at the expense of Thrasyllus and especially Erasinides, since the claim that the latter proposed to abandon the shipwrecked amounts to a hefty accusation. Euryptolemus effectively proposes to punish *some* of the generals, and has done his best to save the ones he has set out to defend (his denials that he is motivated by favoritism notwithstanding). It appears not to have been possible to exonerate Pericles as fully as Diomedon, but Euryptolemus's attempt to help his relative was probably contained in his suggestion that he be the first to stand trial. Consider that both attempts to defend the generals (first by the generals themselves, then by Euryptolemus) are followed initially by the approval of the demos and fail only later thanks to the political machinations of their rivals (1.7.6–7, 34). The general to be tried soonest after Euryptolemus's oration might well have the best chance of survival.

But the truest defense is the one that, as Euryptolemus himself acknowledges (1.7.34), exonerates both the generals and their subordinates. He concludes his speech thus:

Do not, men of Athens...faced with necessities from a god, show yourselves to be unfeeling by condemning of treason men who, faced with impossibility, were rendered unable to do what they had been ordered on account of the storm. But it would be much more just to venerate these victors with wreaths of honor. (1.7.33)

This is the most far-reaching reflection on justice in the oration: it is unjust to punish people for failing to do the impossible. The storm prevented the rescue of the shipwrecked crews; no one is justly to blame. That this is not a view the Athenians will easily accept is suggested by the fact that here, for the only time in the *Hellenica*, the storm that hindered the fleet is said to have been sent by a god.⁴⁷ But to blame a god for the tragedy will hardly be enough to make the demos forgive the generals. Euryptolemus's closing remark, that it would be more just to crown the generals as victors than to kill them, recalls Socrates's hopeless proposal that, as punishment, he should take his meals in the Prytaneum with the Olympic victors.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

To what extent has Xenophon portrayed each of our three subjects as "Socratic" in the *Hellenica*? We must begin by admitting that the very fact of their political activity, including Euryptolemus's public speech in the assembly, marks all three as distinctly un-Socratic.⁴⁹ Alcibiades's constant concern with money-making and Critias's tyrannical lust for unrestrained political power are obvious markers of their failure to transcend the ordinary concerns criticized by Socrates as inferior to the pursuit of wisdom and of unphilosophic hopes and ambitions that would not hold up to rigorous Socratic examination.⁵⁰ As for Euryptolemus, the total lack of historical evidence outside of the *Hellenica* makes his connection to Socrates quite unclear—for all we know, he may be a Xenophontic fiction. It is the fact that Xenophon substitutes Euryptolemus's otherwise unknown objection to

⁴⁷ Pownall therefore connects this statement with Euryptolemus's warnings against impiety ("Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 506).

⁴⁸ Plato, *Apology* 36d2–37a1. Cf. Pownall, "Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 507–8; Krentz, *Xenophon: Hellenika I-II*.3.10, 168.

⁴⁹ Cf. Plato, *Apology* 31c4–32a3. Similar observations are made by Ludwig, "Xenophon as a Socratic Reader," 523, and Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 333.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 208c ff.; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.16.

the illegality of Callixenus's procedure for Socrates's famous one that has prompted our close examination of his speech.⁵¹ But Euryptolemus's decision to address the whole assembly importantly distinguishes him from Socrates, who appears to have stood up only against the *boulē*. Without knowing how Euryptolemus stood with respect to philosophy, we are inclined to suggest that, except for the brief and unusual appearance of Socrates himself, there is no fully Socratic character anywhere in the *Hellenica* (cf. 3.1.2). And yet, in practical and historical terms, this possibility makes way for a potentially paradoxical and surprising conclusion, since it means that Socrates's political legacy in Athens, the indirect effects of his teaching on political affairs, may well have been in many aspects quite un-Socratic.

But then, we do not need the *Hellenica* to tell us that Alcibiades and Critias failed to follow the path of Socratic philosophy. So much is the ostensible point of the very section of the *Memorabilia* in which Xenophon tells us of their association with Socrates. Yet it is well within Xenophon's understanding that a man who fails to transform himself by allowing the force of Socratic insight to permeate and reshape his every thought, imagination, and desire may nonetheless, by attending to Socrates, learn to see and understand much of the world—including or especially the political world—more sharply than he had before, and more sharply than his contemporaries or rivals. Leaving aside the unphilosophic motivations of our three figures, then, do we find that they share some distinctive common feature on the level of their understanding or approach to political activity?

At first blush, it is their differences that stand out more starkly. Each character appears to occupy his own position on a spectrum of approaches to political life, with pure compulsion at one pole (Critias) and pure persuasion at the other (Euryptolemus). Alcibiades stands in the middle, being willing and able to make use of both force and fraud, supplementing one with the other as the occasion demands. On one hand, Alcibiades is therefore the most flexible figure of the three. He is more effective than Euryptolemus in obtaining what he seeks, yet nimbler than Critias in navigating diplomatic and military crises. On the other hand, a comparison of the three men's varied undertakings suggests that a greater dependence on violence comes with greater material and political rewards as well as greater risks. The dangers

⁵¹ Dobski notes the strong sense given by Xenophon "that Euryptolemus articulates the reasons for Socrates' strict lawfulness" ("Athenian Democracy Refounded," 333–34). Pownall goes further, suggesting that Euryptolemus makes precisely the argument Socrates advanced on this occasion ("Condemnation of the Impious in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 263).

faced by Euryptolemus, though not insignificant, are nothing compared with those that force Alcibiades into a lifelong, regrettably rootless wandering, to say nothing of the numerous and extreme perils Critias is forced to confront. But Critias also gains a greater degree of power than Alcibiades or Euryptolemus ever does. Indeed, Euryptolemus is the only one of the three who utterly fails to accomplish anything of what he sets out to do. It seems that each character has come to a different determination of the extent to which real dangers should be risked for the sake of political power.

Our three subjects thus appear to disagree as to the proper measure of force to be employed in political affairs. Critias's open embrace of a cutthroat realpolitik effectively leads him to make violence the coin of his realm. To him, the idea that the rule of law establishes justice by providing for the common good of all is a ubiquitous and *unnecessary* falsehood, and he accordingly disposes of the law in favor of a barefaced admission of avarice and tyrannical ambition. By contrast, both Euryptolemus and Alcibiades are careful to make a public show of respecting Athenian legal convention, especially where this convention overlaps with pious observance.⁵² Alcibiades's use of force or violence over those under his command is legally provided for by the leeway accorded to him as a general. But, as he well knows, he is in turn subject to the violence of the demos if it should ever come to blame him for mismanagement of its trust. Alcibiades therefore attempts to appease the Athenians as much as he can, especially in working to mitigate the reputation for impiety he gained before the opening of the *Hellenica*. He lives in a grey area available to the Athenian *stratēgos*, employing the power of violent compulsion legally entrusted to him by the city, but engaged therefore with the city as with a sovereign and often capricious major partner. Euryptolemus, by contrast, seeks no such privileges from the city, and hence is in principle free from having to give an account of himself. Alcibiades may protest against the accusations of his impiety, but Euryptolemus gives no one any reason to suspect him of impiety in the first place.

Having recognized these differences in the lives led by our three subjects, we are now in a position to observe the crucial similarity. For it must be admitted that the postures adopted by Euryptolemus and Alcibiades toward Athenian law do not necessarily entail any disagreement with Critias as to the character of the law. To be sure, Euryptolemus and Alcibiades show much greater awareness of the importance of respecting the city's belief that Critias

⁵² Ludwig, "Xenophon as a Socratic Reader," discusses Xenophon's sensitivity, as manifest in the *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*, to the need for respecting piety (524–28).

tries to dispel altogether: that the rule of law is not at bottom compulsion of the ruled, but the means by which a city, persuaded by the wise, attains justice or the common good. And yet Alcibiades demonstrates both that he believes force must be employed when persuasion falls short, and that his interests are better pursued by disobeying the sovereign Athenian assembly when its imprudence becomes too great. Even Euryptolemus, who is much freer than Alcibiades to protect his reputation by publicly eulogizing strict adherence to the law, manipulates the psychology of the assembly when it comes to the justice and piety of legal procedure. He plays on their fear of *hubris* and defers only when necessary to their need for retribution, both of which are powerfully expressed in the Athenians' understanding of their duties and rights under the law. Indeed, if the arguments of Pownall and Gish are correct, Euryptolemus is not even telling the truth in claiming that the proposed procedure of the sovereign demos on this occasion is illegal.⁵³

It is to be recalled that Socrates too condemned the illegality of this procedure. It would seem, then, that Socrates himself was willing to distort the letter of the law in order to employ its psychological force for the sake of political persuasion. But Xenophon, who went to great lengths to defend the memory of Socrates in his *Memorabilia*, certainly does not make that conclusion so easy to draw.⁵⁴ As a result, there is much that one could feasibly deny in the thesis that the three "Socratic" characters we have been studying share a Socratic critique of law. One could deny that Critias and Alcibiades retained *any* Socratic lesson intact, that Euryptolemus believes anything other than what he says to the assembly, or even that Socrates himself held any critique of law to be sound. Xenophon has therefore written in such a way that, if one is to reach firm conclusions about the influence of Socratic philosophy upon his "non-Socratic" works, much will depend upon one's prior understanding

⁵³ Pownall, "Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*"; Gish, "Defending *Dēmokratia*." Due, "The Trial of the Generals in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," goes so far as to cast Euryptolemus's machinations as demagogic. Euryptolemus's willingness to dissemble is most evident in his passing mention of the "twelve" ships (not twenty-five; 1.6.34) the storm-hindered Athenians failed to recover (1.7.30). But cf. Lang, "Theramenes and Arginousai," 270–71, who denies that Euryptolemus is consciously lying. See also Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded," 331, who notes on a related point that Euryptolemus "must employ a rhetoric that emphasizes the importance of traditional authorities."

⁵⁴ Indeed, Socrates's only act in the *Hellenica* is to express precisely the view that the "Socratic" characters appear to have discarded. Xenophon therefore protects the memory of Socrates in the *Hellenica* as well. Pownall also suggests that Xenophon distorts the historical events out of respect for Socrates, but differs from me in supposing that Socrates genuinely misunderstood the law ("Shifting Viewpoints in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," 503). Still, the question is not *whether* Xenophon distorts the facts to protect Socrates, but *how*, and this, as I suggest below, cannot be determined on the basis of the *Hellenica* alone. Cf. also Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times*, 157n90.

of Socratic thought, about which there is bound to be no little disagreement. If the critique of law presented, for example, by Alcibiades in the *Memorabilia* is taken for a kind of Socratic signature, then Socrates's fingerprints can be seen upon the thoughts, speeches, and deeds of Euryptolemus, Alcibiades, and even Critias—though the last is the most flagrantly un-Socratic. Otherwise, the most we can say with confidence is that Xenophon wants us to consider the speech of Euryptolemus in the light of Socrates's sole mention in the *Hellenica*. It is at any rate the speech of Euryptolemus that receives Xenophon's highest honor in the *Hellenica*, that of being associated with Socrates. In this respect, Alcibiades has only the secondary honor of being said to be a kind of friend and associate of Euryptolemus (1.4.19). But if the speech of Euryptolemus is the best a Socratic could do to help his friends who had come into a grave conflict with the city, at least we can say in Alcibiades's defense that he was able to save himself. If Euryptolemus resembles Socrates, it is Alcibiades who most resembles Xenophon.

The Radicalness of Strauss's *On Tyranny*

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Abstract: In *On Tyranny* Leo Strauss attributes to Xenophon a series of extreme and counter-intuitive claims about the respective characters of the tyrant and the philosopher, the power of wisdom in the world, the essence of political legitimacy, and the best regime. Identifying and connecting Strauss's provocative claims on these subjects, this article argues that it was the theoretically radical strain in classical political philosophy that Strauss is tracing in this work which is at the root of the great moderation of classical political philosophy in practice.

STRAUSS AND XENOPHON

Leo Strauss took Xenophon's short, rarely studied dialogue *Hiero, or The One with the Tyrannical Art*, as the subject for his first major work on classical political philosophy. In the course of interpreting this little dialogue, Strauss offers in his *On Tyranny* a series of bold reflections on political men and philosophers, the characteristic passions and aims of each, and the differences between them, leading him into the two biggest questions of classical political philosophy: What is the best way of life, and what is the best regime? On this basis, Strauss makes important observations on the fundamental divide between ancient and modern political philosophy. Although his interpretation became the basis for a fascinating extended debate with Alexander Kojève on the relation of theory to practice, especially in the modern world and especially in relation to the divide between Socratic and Hegelian philosophy, this essay will focus on Strauss's analysis of the *Hiero* and the radical claims he makes on its basis on behalf of the unfettered rule of wisdom.

In Xenophon's dialogue *Hiero* the wise poet Simonides, visiting the court of the tyrant of Syracuse, asks him to enlighten him on the one matter that Hiero is likely to know better than he does: "how the tyrannical and the private life differ in human joys and pains."¹ Hiero proceeds to denigrate the tyrannical life, with evident exaggerations but also with some evidently genuine expressions of regret, especially regarding the absence of love and trust in his life. Indeed, so energetically does Hiero counter Simonides's speculations as to the happiness of his life that he grows positively despondent. At this point Simonides proposes a number of reforms for the mutual benefit of Hiero and his subjects: he should offer prizes to stir competition, especially in profitable enterprises; he should encourage useful innovation; he should adorn not his own palace but the city with public buildings and temples; he should assign his mercenaries to guard not only his own person but also the citizens and their property; he should assign others to do odious tasks such as punishing, while giving out rewards himself; he should refrain from entering his own teams in the chariot races at the Panhellenic games and instead aim to make Syracuse as a whole the city best represented by successful competitors. In such ways, Simonides promises, he will secure the love of his subjects and "the most noble and most blessed possession to be met with among human beings": he will be happy without being envied (*Hiero* 11.15).

Strauss, perhaps inspired by the boldness of Simonides's promises that happiness may be attained through tyranny and by the enigma of Xenophon's own silence on that radical question, writes in a manner that is for him both unusually bold and characteristically subtle. His interpretation is indeed a succession of provocative and, I will argue, often highly exaggerated claims, some eventually qualified in scattered comments and others openly retracted. These include the claim that the tyrant as such is characterized by the desire for love and the philosopher as such by the desire for honor, that a wise man can do anything he wishes with an interlocutor in conversation, that Simonides almost drives Hiero to suicide, that wisdom is the sole and sufficient title to political office, and that the absolute rule of the wise is the best regime. Assessing and tracing the connections between these and related provocative claims that Strauss makes will allow us to begin unpacking his

¹ Xenophon, *Hiero or Tyrannicus* 1.2, trans. Martin Kendrick and Seth Benardete, in *On Tyranny*, by Leo Strauss, rev. ed., ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Citations from this translation of the *Hiero* will be given in the text by chapter and section and citations from this edition of Strauss's *On Tyranny* and "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*" will be given by page.

dense interpretation and its suggestions about what modern politics has to learn from ancient political philosophy.

THE TYRANT

Who, then, to begin with, is the tyrant? Xenophon does not consider it necessary to offer a definition in his little work on tyranny, but Strauss observes that this phenomenon, so readily identifiable in the ancient world, has become obscured in ours by both moral relativism and modern social science. Strauss clearly distinguishes modern tyranny from its traditional form by observing that modern tyranny has at its disposal both science and ideology, but how does he define tyranny in what he insists is its original, still relevant, and fundamental meaning?

Strauss in fact allows the question of tyranny's proper definition to become an unfolding puzzle, offering a number of reports of others' definitions as well as more than one suggestion of his own that appear to be in some tension. He reports Machiavelli's view that tyranny differs from monarchy only in being a term of opprobrium (23); Aristotle's statement that the goal of tyranny is pleasure and that of kingship is nobility (37 and 92; *Politics* 1311a4–5); the "vulgar" view that tyranny is rule that is good for the ruler and bad for his subjects and the gentlemanly view that tyranny is rule that is in fact bad for both (40, but cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1295a17–22); the popular view endorsed by Xenophon in the *Hellenica* that a tyrant is one who violently seizes all power for himself (118n5 and *Hellenica* 7.1.46); Rousseau's view that a tyrant is a usurper of royal authority regardless of the quality of his rule (119n7); Burke's view that tyranny is the unwise or unwarranted use even of legal powers (120n47); and finally Xenophon's Socrates's view that in contrast to the kingship that is rule by one over willing subjects and in accordance with law, tyranny is rule over unwilling subjects and in accordance not with law but with the will of the ruler (68; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.6.12; Aristotle, *Politics* 1295a15–17). Strauss himself offers a revision of the definition of Xenophon's Socrates, following the lead of Xenophon's Simonides: tyranny of the ordinary kind is, to be sure, rule over unwilling subjects without law, but "tyranny is essentially...monarchic rule without laws"—in the best case over willing subjects (69). In keeping with this definition of tyranny, Strauss agrees with Xenophon's character Mandane in calling the Median ruler Astyages a tyrant because he rules without law, even though he inherited his throne legitimately and reigns without notable opposition—and this despite the fact that Xenophon himself calls Astyages a king (Strauss 46; Xenophon,

Cyropaedia 1.3.18 and 1.2.1). Tyranny so understood becomes the subject of Strauss's most serious investigation as he considers whether the best form of it might not be the very best regime.

Yet we observe that Strauss never calls Cyrus the elder a tyrant, who like Astyages in the *Cyropaedia* inherits his throne legitimately and like him holds absolute rule. Moreover, in taking up the difficulty of actually establishing what he has been considering the good form of tyranny, the rule of wisdom without law, Strauss implicitly withdraws his definition of tyranny as rule without law but not necessarily without consent. "Being a tyrant, being called a tyrant and not a king, means having been unable to transform tyranny into kingship, or to transform a title which is generally considered defective into a title which is generally considered valid" (75). The absence of consent or recognized legitimacy and not the absence of law is after all what makes a tyrant. There is truth in the Machiavellian claim that a tyrant is merely a king whom the speaker hates, but this hatred, when widespread, makes such a difference that it defines the regime. Continued opposition makes the rule oppressive; it shows that the ruler is defective and in need of a teacher. This is why, Strauss says, Agesilaus and Cyrus are not tyrants despite the absolute nature of their rules, and neither, after all, is Astyages, whom he now cites precisely as one who successfully made good his claim to rule (121nn50–51). What is the meaning of this shift in Strauss's definition of tyranny from rule without law to rule without consent? To understand it we must understand what Strauss is showing us about the essential character of the tyrant and the wise man or philosopher.

LOVE VS. HONOR

To illuminate the fundamental difference between the tyrant and the wise man, Strauss offers a series of bold and counterintuitive claims: the tyrant is a man who seeks love and not honor; the wise man is one who seeks honor and not love; the wise man's love of honor is indeed the foundation of his desire to know (79–80, 87–88, 90). How could it be that a desire for love is *the* motive driving the ruthless acts that bring tyrants to the throne? How could it be that wise men, so often content to live in obscurity, are moved above all by honor? The stark dichotomy Strauss draws here is in fact considerably softened by other scattered comments in his original interpretation and especially in his "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*." The tyrant does of course seek honor too, as Simonides acknowledges in saying that honor is what drives men to seek tyranny in the first place (191, 198; *Hiero* 7.1–2). The wise man or philosopher

does of course feel love, as all humans do, though he is more discriminating in the objects of his love than most (198–203). While Hiero does, to be sure, present the chief defects of the tyrannical life in terms of its impediments to finding genuine love, either erotic or popular, and Simonides does, to be sure, praise nothing so highly as honor, both have rhetorical purposes that force us to read with skepticism (46–48, 60, 68, 78). Strauss's own interest is less with the tyrant as such than with the political man altogether, for whom the tyrant in his book is to some extent a stand-in (78–79, 88); hence it is not at all clear that the tyrant craves love more than or even as much as other political men. Finally, to the extent that it is the tyrant in particular that we are examining, Strauss also raises the question whether he and the wise man may not be united in both seeking pleasure above all (93–95).

The gap between tyrant and wise man or philosopher widens again in a different and more serious way as Strauss acknowledges that indeed not honor but wisdom matters most to the philosopher (101, 198), that the philosopher as such is indeed free from ambition, and that the pleasure of seeing himself progressing in knowledge, or of self-admiration, to which honor from others is secondary, is itself secondary to the good that is seeking and advancing in wisdom, inasmuch as all pleasures are secondary to the activities that they accompany (205). The key thought here is that the highest and purest love of honor is an outgrowth of the desire for excellence and of the resulting desire to have one's excellence confirmed. Therefore the lover of honor in the purest sense is concerned not with popular acclaim but with the judgment of wise and well-qualified judges. By contrast, the political man wants honor especially because he yearns for love. And Hiero himself confirms this: his complaints about the honor he does get are all framed in terms of the absence of genuine goodwill behind it or the impossibility of knowing when it reflects real attachment and when mere fear. The true relation of philosopher to political man is best captured in a proportion, Strauss concludes: "The philosopher is related to the ruler in a way comparable to that in which the ruler is related to the family man." It is on this basis that "there can be no difficulty in characterizing the ruler, in contradistinction to the philosopher, by 'love' and the philosopher by 'honor'" (199). As the family man's attachments are narrowly restricted to his own and his chief desire is to love and be loved by them as his own, and as the political man's affections are broader and his desires are focused more on honor for his excellent qualities and deeds, even if he values those qualities and deeds chiefly for their ability to bring him love, so the philosopher's affections are broadest of all, extending to excellent and potentially excellent human beings in all times and places, and his

desires are purest, focused on honor as a confirmation of the excellence that he loves most of all.

Strauss's point, then, is not that the desire for love is characteristic of tyrants in contradistinction to other political men or even other private men. Compared with a man like Cyrus, whose life and imagination are fired by the prospect of winning boundless popular love and gratitude, Hiero is clearly less powerfully gripped by this desire, especially in its public form, and the pleasure of private erotic love, the point on which Simonides perceives Hiero to be most dissatisfied with tyranny (*Hiero* 8.6), is not a plausible motive for staging a bloody coup. Rather, what is revealing in drawing out these threads from this dialogue is the insight that *even* in a tyrant, even in a man so ready to do things so clearly prone to make him hated, even if he feels it strongly only in pederastic love affairs and in his dismay at popular hostility, an obscure love of and desire to be loved by his people is the key to what makes him political. "The political man...is essentially attached to human beings. This attachment is at the bottom of his desire to rule human beings, or of his ambition. But to rule human beings means to serve them. Certainly an attachment to beings which prompts one to serve them may well be called love of them" (199). Even the tyrant, who seems motivated by a wish for honor at the cost of love, is distinguished from the philosopher by nothing more clearly than by his greater concern for love and his weaker concern for true honor.

This is an interesting point in itself, but its chief interest for Strauss is not in what we can learn about the conflicted, unsavory men who become tyrants but in what we can learn about the wise men like Simonides who are drawn to reflecting, if only for an hour, on how a bad tyranny might be turned into a better one. What is Simonides's real aim in conversing with Hiero?

THE POWER OF WISDOM

Strauss's suggestion about Simonides's purpose is framed in terms of another provocative claim: "If Simonides was wise, he had conversational skill; i.e., he could do what he liked with any interlocutor, or he could lead any conversation to the end which he desired" (38; cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.14). Then, since Simonides leads the discussion to "such suggestions about the improvement of tyrannical rule as a wise man could be expected to make towards a tyrant towards whom he is well disposed," Strauss gives the impression of concluding both that Simonides is wise and that he intends to benefit Hiero; thence he proceeds to examine Simonides's pedagogical strategy. Strauss seems to be claiming for wisdom an almost fantastic power,

an impression he reinforces later when he suggests that Simonides induces in Hiero such despondency that he brings him to the brink of suicide, thereby demonstrating his ability to supplant him before showing his goodwill and turning the discussion in a constructive direction (58–59). This extreme claim for the power of speech echoes and is connected to another, similarly radical claim—that wisdom is the sole valid title to rule, which is in turn a version of the famously provocative claim of Socrates that the knower is the only true king (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.9.10).

Now all of this needs extensive qualification. Strauss in fact makes clear that he is proceeding on the basis of an assessment of Simonides's wisdom that he has been able to make only after close comparison of Simonides with Socrates and of the *Hiero* with the *Memorabilia* and *Oeconomicus*. Strauss acknowledges even as he suggests that Simonides has the power to bring *Hiero* to suicide that this statement is a gross exaggeration, offered only “for purposes of clarification” (58). And we will see presently his qualifications of the claim that wisdom is the sole valid title to political office. But what precisely is Strauss clarifying about Simonides by overstating his power?

To understand this we need to consider this exaggeration in light of another, less obvious and opposite exaggeration: Strauss's suggestion that in fact Simonides's entire practical purpose in the conversation is not to subvert Hiero's throne, not to induce him to make drastic reforms and not necessarily even moderate reforms, but just one small change—that he stop competing personally in chariot races (63, 188). Now Strauss does say “perhaps,” but the attribution to Simonides of such a limited aim is odd, especially given that Strauss himself notes another reform suggested by Simonides that Hiero is already adapting by the end of the conversation: he has begun referring to himself not as tyrant but as ruler (63 and 65). It is odd, moreover, because Strauss implies that Simonides's other recommendations are somehow utopian, although other changes are clearly practicable, safe, and likely beneficial, such as spending more on public buildings and less on private ones, and some would positively enhance the stability of his reign, such as delegating the execution of punishments to others. To be sure, there is a serious question about the proposal that Hiero give prizes to citizens for prowess in war, implying that he should arm at least some of the citizens if he has already disarmed them. But is even this really impossible for a tyrant?²

² Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1314b30–15b10, where Aristotle proposes many of these same reforms as a means to stabilize a tyranny, and suggests that under such a moderate tyranny it would not be necessary to disarm the populace.

Strauss implies that it is impossible, that one who tried such a reform would only end up falling between two stools, losing his safety without gaining a loyal populace. Yet elsewhere Strauss suggests not that this step is impossible but only that it is rarely possible, or indeed that it is often possible but not under conditions that a decent ruler would wish for (188); or even that, so far is the gulf between tyranny and monarchy from being unbridgeable that rulers who fail to bridge it are defective in wisdom (75 and n. 50). To be sure, Simonides does not go so far as to recommend establishing a rule of law, the ultimate step in changing a hated tyranny into an accepted and revered kingship, but might Simonides refrain from proposing this change only because he sees Hiero's lack of enthusiasm for less radical changes? It is best, then, to say not that Simonides seriously proposes only the small expedient of ceasing to engage personally in chariot racing, but that he makes a range of proposals, any of which would be improvements, without knowing whether Hiero might implement all or a few or only one of them, but prepared to be content even with one.

Putting these observations together, we may say that the sober Simonides is in control of the conversation in this limited but significant sense: he knows what he is about and plays his hand masterfully. Simonides's advice, with its modest aim, the modesty of which Strauss exaggerates for pedagogical purposes, exemplifies the realism of classical political philosophy. Simonides opens with a perfectly chosen question; he knows his subject matter; he listens before trying to persuade; he prepares his ground carefully, with shrewd maneuvers that Strauss nicely illuminates in his third chapter; he does not attempt the imprudent or the impossible; and he is satisfied with making such small but solid improvements as he can. By contrast, Strauss says of the modern world, "we are in the habit of expecting too much" (181). Strauss's exaggerated claim of reason's persuasive power points to the opposite truth, reason's limited persuasive power, and the wisdom of accepting it.

THE BEST REGIME

Yet cutting against this most sober conclusion is still Strauss's second and more radical set of claims for reason: that wisdom is the sole title to rule, and indeed that a form of lawless tyranny, the unconstrained rule of the wise, is the best regime. Neither Xenophon nor Simonides directly makes any such claim in the *Hiero*. The most Simonides says is that by following his advice Hiero might make himself and his city happy; the most Simonides shows is that he is momentarily charmed by his own reveries about a rationally

improved tyranny. Where Xenophon barely points to the questions of the basis of legitimate rule and the best regime, Strauss pursues them boldly, in a spirit that rivals or exceeds Xenophon's own most daring thought experiment, the *Cyropaedia*. In attributing to Xenophon the answers to these questions that he does, then, Strauss exaggerates again. Yet Xenophon's dialogue has fallen into neglect. Thinking through the boldest claims of reason to rule is essential for understanding the political things, and Xenophon with his light touch offers important hints concerning them that are in danger of being missed in our hurried, unsubtle time. Moreover, Strauss insists, "only if read in the light of the question posed by the *Hiero* do the relevant passages of Xenophon's other writings reveal their full meaning" (76).

Xenophon's hints that the merits of wise tyranny are the dialogue's deepest theme come through the drama or action of the dialogue. The wise Simonides is present at a tyrant's court and is interested in talking to him about his life. There is something in tyranny that intrigues a wise man, perhaps the same thing that intrigued Plato about Dionysus, a later tyrant of the same city of Syracuse. To the classical political philosophers, the political and philosophic lives are *the* two most serious contenders for the best life, and weighing the merits of each is an activity worth returning to. If a classical political philosopher were to be tempted to devote extensive time and energy to political action, it would be less as a dutiful citizen under established laws in peacetime than under the circumstances that invite inventive wisdom to create something radically new and better—circumstances that are found nowhere more fully than under tyranny. Might it not be possible with such a free hand to make a political community happy and to win lasting gratitude? This thought in some form is clearly on Simonides's mind. The structure of the dialogue, in which the unwise Hiero's indictment of tyranny as he practices it is followed by the wise Simonides's proposals for correcting these defects and promises of mutual benefit to Hiero and his subjects for doing so, leaves the reader to wonder how fully a wise tyranny might fulfill the hope of the highest political aspirations.

Strauss goes far in giving this question a positive answer. He observes that the city ruled by a tyrant may be happy and prosperous, that the tyrant may be united to his subjects with bonds of mutual kindness, and that all the arts, including the military arts, may be well developed there. He acknowledges that a state without law will be a state without liberty (68), that indeed the subjects will be "literally at the mercy of the tyrant and his mercenaries" (69), that their property cannot be secure, and that he can never accord them

“the ‘equality of honor’ which is irreconcilable with tyrannical rule and from the lack of which they may be presumed always to suffer” (70). Yet Strauss insists that “these shortcomings of tyranny at its best are not, however, necessarily decisive” (70), that Xenophon’s view of the merits of tyranny at its best depends on how essential he thought liberty was for happiness, and that Xenophon’s own view was that it is not after all essential. Strauss makes two arguments for this surprising claim. First, he says, freedom was considered the aim of democracy but virtue the aim of aristocracy, and “Xenophon was not a democrat” (71). This consideration would be decisive only if freedom were not also essential to aristocracy, which Xenophon preferred, but this is a doubtful premise. Second, Strauss says, “Xenophon’s view is reflected in Hiero’s implicit assertion that the wise are not concerned with freedom,” citing Hiero’s statement that tyrants “fear the brave because they might dare something for the sake of freedom, the wise because they might contrive something, and the just because the multitude might desire to be ruled by them” (*Hiero* 5.1). Even if the correct inference is that these are three non-overlapping groups and that the wise would not take risks for the sake of political freedom, and even if we can take Hiero to speak for Xenophon on this point, the proper conclusion is not that Xenophon judged freedom to be a matter of indifference to the wise, since the freedom that matters most to them may be freedom of a different kind. Nor is the proper conclusion that Xenophon judged political freedom to be unimportant for the majority of human beings who are not wise. Freedom may still be essential for the form of happiness that is available to them, and such would seem to be the final teaching of the *Cyropaedia*: the regime of Old Persia that Cyrus subverts is superior to anything he is able to put in its place, as much as he would like to make his subjects happy.

But Strauss displays his radicalness in refusing to be stopped by any of these considerations. Yes, aristocracy as commonly conceived entails a high degree of freedom for those educated to virtue and the security of laws for all the citizens, but Strauss wishes to consider whether its highest aim of virtue might not in fact be available in the absence of freedom and law. Strauss concedes that the virtue possible under tyranny will be virtue of “a specific color,” different from republican virtue (72), and that, in particular, “only a qualified or reduced form of courage and justice befit the subjects of a tyrant. For prowess simply is closely akin to freedom, or love of freedom, and justice simply is obedience to laws” (71). Yet, he continues, “prowess simply” does not belong to Socrates either, and “justice can be understood as a part of moderation,” which Simonides does say the subjects may possess (71–72).

This is again strange: after all, what may not be necessary for the philosopher Socrates to enjoy his unique form of happiness may be necessary to the rest of us; the best way to understand justice as a part of moderation is to define moderation as Socrates does in the *Republic* as obedience to rulers and control over one's own appetites, but how is obedience to a tyrant justice? It normally is not, but what Strauss is considering is unlimited rule by the wise, and obedience to reason itself may indeed be reasonably called justice.

Strauss argues further that "the question of what Simonides thought about the possibility of virtue under tyrannical rule seems to be definitively settled by an explicit statement of his according to which 'gentlemen' may live, and live happily, under a beneficent tyrant" (72). Here he cites *Hiero* 10.3. This is strange as well. Simonides speaks there only of the presence of gentlemen in Hiero's Syracuse—gentlemen who were raised under a different regime—not of their happiness or even potential happiness, nor of the possibility of fostering future generations of gentlemen under tyranny. To be sure, Simonides does speak of the happiness of the city, which could be taken to mean the happiness of every member—but on that definition happy cities would never exist. The happiness that is possible under Hiero might well consist only in the prosperous contentment of the majority and the resigned acquiescence of the now-eclipsed gentlemen. Moreover, Simonides alludes to this happiness merely as a fine goal for Hiero to aspire to, never promising that it is capable of perfect attainment (*Hiero* 11.5 and 7). In the end, Strauss himself concedes that Simonides's promises cannot definitively settle the question after all: what he says with a view to heartening the despondent Hiero cannot be taken as Xenophon's own last word (73).

This concession, however, only leads Strauss to renew the charge on different grounds. Setting the *Hiero* aside, he considers now whether his conclusion that "as a matter of principle, the rule of laws is not essential for good government" is not still defensible on the basis of Xenophon's or Socrates's political philosophy taken as a whole (73). And he concludes that it is. For Socratic political philosophy offers a quiet but sustained and in the end searing critique of the identification of justice with the rule of laws. Laws are often framed unwisely. They are always relative to the regime, and no regime can benefit all citizens equally (see Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.40–47). They must in any case be framed most generally, and as such are blunt instruments. Justice according to Xenophon's best definition is not law, which can be good or bad, but rather beneficence, or rule that achieves the common good. And for ascertaining the common good, a living intelligence is better than blind

law. "Absolute rule of a man who knows how to rule, who is a born ruler, is actually superior to the rule of laws, insofar as the good ruler is a 'seeing law,' and laws do not 'see'" (74). We pass over the unsettling fact that Strauss here cites Xenophon's Cyrus's claim to be a seeing law at the moment when he is making all his subjects his "eyes and ears" by turning them to spying against one another and to sinister contests for his favor. We even set aside the question whether in practice it would be better to be the subject of even a perfectly wise and perfectly benevolent king than a citizen in a free republic. Perhaps any such rule would still have the effect of making us children, and so perhaps a wise ruler would see that his best course would be, whenever possible, to found a republic. We set these questions aside because the most serious question Strauss is tackling is not after all what regime works best in practice, but rather, what is the truest, most solid claim to political authority. On this question, Strauss's answer is uncompromisingly radical. "Xenophon's Socrates makes it clear that there is only one sufficient title to rule: only knowledge, and not force and fraud or election, or, we may add, inheritance makes a man a king or ruler" (74).

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In practice, Strauss readily concedes, tyranny has grave and indeed decisive drawbacks. These he initially expresses with the thought that while Xenophon held that "beneficent tyranny or the rule of a tyrant who listens to the counsels of the wise is, as a matter of principle, preferable to the rule of laws," yet "tyranny at its best could hardly, if ever, be realized" (75). Precisely as he begins to consider the practical problems with tyranny, Strauss makes the shift we noted earlier from defining tyranny as rule without law to rule without consent. For the massive fact on the ground is that those called tyrants are rulers who have not succeeded in making good their title to rule, and this reflects the massive problem that they are defective as rulers and lacking in wisdom. In other words, what we actually find among all regimes corresponding to *any* of the definitions of tyranny Strauss has cited are no wise men ruling without laws but with consent, and many unwise men ruling without either. Why is this?

Most simply, the problem is that the wise are not inclined to seize political power, as they crave not rule but leisure to think and write and engage in private conversations, and those who are just and in general serious about virtue, while often desirous of power, are not inclined to usurp it. But rulers lacking not only legitimacy under established constitutions but also wisdom

and virtue are most unlikely to be able to secure the consent of their subjects. Nevertheless, the very defectiveness of tyrants that puts them in need of wise advisers makes them interesting to philosophers as potential partners. Might a young, intelligent tyrant, eager to learn what he needs to rule well, not be the perfect partner for a wise man, whose work as adviser would be a most beneficial but decidedly part-time occupation? No less a man than Plato was evidently charmed by this prospect. Yet he was not successful with Dionysus, any more than Aristotle was with Alexander, or Thomas More with Henry VIII. The chief problem is already indicated by Plato in his *Laws* when the Athenian Stranger tells the startled Kleinias and Megillus that there is no swifter path to establishing a good regime than for a wise man to take as his partner a young tyrant who is a good learner and possessed of a good memory, courage, magnificence, and moderation (Plato, *Laws* 709e–10d). A ruler who is not wise needs virtue and especially moderation to listen to one who is, and those who seize thrones violently and even those who inherit them are seldom well endowed with moderation. The prospect of a virtuous and compliant tyrant envisioned by the Athenian Stranger is virtually utopian, and at any rate he propounds it only as a means to establish what is most emphatically a rule of law.

So is Strauss's more serious thought only that the best regime in principle is not an unstable attempt by a wise man to guide an absolute ruler of an ordinary sort, but it is the direct rule of a wise man himself, as envisioned in Plato's *Republic*—as unlikely as such a man is ever to come to power? In fact, Strauss goes beyond indicating the unlikeliness of this prospect to showing further grave problems with it. For it turns out that the title of the wise as wise to rule is after all defective. We have already noted the wise man's lack of desire for ruling. Strauss puts this point most forcefully as follows: "The ruler whose specific function is 'doing' or 'well-doing' has to serve all his subjects. Socrates, on the other hand, whose specific function is 'speaking' or discussing, does not engage in discussion except with those with whom he likes to converse. The wise man alone is free" (84). We might well raise the Aristotelian consideration of whether it is not unjust to assign to the best human being a life that is not the best life—that of ruling rather than contemplation—but Strauss goes in a different direction, showing on the basis of the inclinations of the wise significant limitations in their capacity to rule. Contrasting the political man's desire for love with the wise man's desire for admiration, Strauss observes, "Only because the ruler has the desire to be loved by 'human beings' as such is he able to become the willing servant and benefactor of all his subjects and hence to become a good ruler. The wise man, on the other hand, has no such

desire; he is satisfied with the admiration, the praise, the approval of a small minority” (88). Likewise he observes, “The born ruler, as distinguished from him who is born to become wise, must have strong warlike inclinations” and even “a streak of cruelty” (90–91). But if the wise as such do not have these essential qualities for ruling effectively, wisdom is not after all the sole title to rule, as much as the wise might know exactly what needs to be done, should they have the heart and the stomach to do it.³

On the other side is the problem Strauss acknowledges in his “Restatement,” that at least a decisively important segment of the “gentlemen” will not after all live happily under any tyrant, the “real men” or *andres* whose dominant passion is the love of honor (189–90). Loving honor, they will seek both the freedom for themselves without which there is no true dignity and the freedom for their fellows without which no honor bestowed by them can be trusted to be genuine. Such honor lovers may be inferior to the philosophers, but as Simonides says (*Hiero* 7.3) they are superior to the human beings who do not love honor—or at least to those for whom neither the love of truth nor the love of honor is the dominant passion. For perhaps all human beings care about honor, and with it freedom, as Simonides indirectly acknowledges in twice attributing the love or pleasure of honor to *anthrōpoi* generally even as he claims it as the special mark of *andres* (*Hiero* 7.1 and 4): “The poet cannot help admitting implicitly the unity of the human species which his statement explicitly denies” (190). But all of this implies at the very least that neither the wise who are capable of the best life of philosophy nor the spirited honor lovers who pursue the second-best life of political action will be happy under Strauss’s best regime, and ultimately for the same reason—that neither is free. The rule of the wise without law is not best even in principle, if by “best in principle” we mean as an arrangement that would be good all around if only a practicable way could be found to implement it. Human nature stands in the way.

THE PROBLEM OF LAW AND LEGITIMACY

Strauss himself does not identify the lack of freedom for both philosopher and honor-loving gentlemen as a decisive drawback to the rule of the wise without laws. But he does draw a conclusion that is consistent with these threads of his thought that we have drawn together and followed out. “The ‘tyrannical’ teaching—the teaching which expounds the view that a case

³ That there may be exceptions to this general characterization Xenophon himself suggests in portraying himself as an aspiring leader in the *Anabasis*.

can be made for beneficent tyranny...has then a purely theoretical meaning. It is not more than a most forceful expression of the problem of law and legitimacy" (76).⁴ What, precisely, is this problem? Is it the problem of partisanship and blindness and overgenerality we have already seen with law, and the fact that recognized legitimacy is requisite for stable government and yet rests too much on the arbitrariness of tradition and the accidents of birth? If this were the whole problem, could it not be largely solved with provisions for judicial discretion and emergency powers, together with better means of electing leaders and structuring legislatures? These are wise ways of mitigating what Strauss calls the problem of law and legitimacy, but they do not yet get to the bottom of what that problem is. An analogue to it is seen vividly in the common tyrant, whose "lack of unquestioned authority" causes tyrannical rule to be essentially oppressive (75). The deepest problem regarding law and legitimacy is that reason itself lacks unquestioned authority, and yet, according to Xenophon's Socrates, rightful authority belongs only to reason and to nothing else.

This is the real meaning of Socrates's strange claim, in the chapter of the *Memorabilia* to which Strauss refers us at this point (3.9), that the true ruler is the one who understands, even if he wears no crown and has been elected to no office. Socrates, as he often does, gives the impression here of a high-minded naiveté, as if he thought that knowledge has an almost magical power to command obedience and that its power extends to the protection of the knower against tyrants who are inclined to want to kill wise subjects who speak the truth. In fact Socrates is saying something more sober but also more radically subversive of *all* actual political authority: there is only one sense in which the giving of an order is thoroughly good and hence rightful, and obedience to that order thoroughly good and hence obligatory, and that is if the giver of the order knows and is teaching what is best for the recipient to do. The orders of a good doctor, the directions of a good guide, and the instructions of a knowledgeable seaman are proper to obey, and carry a penalty for disobedience, even if the one giving them has no personal power

⁴ Strauss's own path to this conclusion concentrates on actual tyranny's more massive practical problem, its invariably oppressive character. That line of reasoning leaves open, however, an interesting gap. If tyranny is best understood not as rule without consent but as rule without law, and if all the men *called* tyrants are in fact defective rulers who have failed to make good their claims to rule, why is Strauss leaving out of account those usurpers who have succeeded at this, as well as those who inherited their reigns but rule absolutely, like Astyages? The reason can only be that such rulers, neither truly wise nor so troubled by resistance that they perceive themselves to be in need of wise advisers, are of no particular interest to the philosopher, as they offer no opening for potentially wise rule. Theirs are merely to be counted among the more or less despotic regimes that the world is all too full of.

to enforce them, in the precise sense that disregarding good advice always carries the penalty that one's affairs will fare worse than if one followed it.

These arguments in *Memorabilia* 3.9.10–13 follow almost immediately upon another famous Socratic paradox, that “justice and every other form of virtue is wisdom” (3.9.5). The usual direction in which this equation is read emphasizes the compelling power of wisdom over the one who has it. This is, I would suggest, a serious Socratic thought, although one that requires us to raise the bar for what it means to have true knowledge or wisdom higher than we usually set it. But in the context of Socrates's subsequent claims about rightful authority, we may also reverse the direction: whatever and only whatever is wise to do is right to do.

Of course it is sensible and hence wise in very many cases to obey unwise orders and laws backed up by force, but then it is only extraneous considerations and not the rightness of the command itself or the right of the commander himself to give it that dictates acquiescence. Many claims of political authority, to be sure, rest on mere force—“to the victor belong the spoils,” and “might makes right,” people sometimes say and in prior times often said—but such claims are no different from a slave owner's claim to the obedience of his slaves, reasonably disregarded whenever they can make good their escape or revolt. Being born to office carries no more right with it, but neither does the subject's own prior choice or consent. What is right is what is truly good, and if consent was given in ignorance either of what would subsequently be ordered or of what is best, it confers no right. The problem of law and legitimacy is that authority, be it in parents, generals, doctors, kings, or presidents, has no other rightful basis than reason, looking to the good of the ruled or to the common good of the community of which the ruler is a part. And yet all actual law, all actual political power that is deemed legitimate, has and necessarily must have a substantial admixture of exploitation, folly, stubborn inflexibility, and unreasonable deference to accident.

Seeing all this as clearly as they did, the ancient Socratic political philosophers nonetheless drew gentle and moderate conclusions about politics and gave sober advice. And their practical conclusion was to endorse the rule of law. To see the limits of the power of reason in politics and to think through to the bottom the problem of the best regime, and hence the problem of law and legitimacy, is also to see how to get the benefits of reason to the greatest extent possible in actual practice, and that is through moderate, stable regimes based on law.

For law is the use of compulsion but not merely compulsion: it is an attempt to embody the rule of reason in our collective lives, the best attempt humans have found. Law is essential for freedom and constitutive of freedom not only in the way that it gives each citizen security of action and repose within well-defined limits, but in the way that it attempts to enlist all the citizens collectively in holding themselves, on an equal basis, to a standard of behavior that experience has shown to be good, a standard that is not the highest but that is worthy of great respect, a standard of basic decency and fairness and public-spiritedness and shared responsibility for the needs of the community. Law brings dignity because there is dignity in this act of individually embracing the community's standards as one's own and of mutual holding one another to account.

But to say this much is to leave out something that Strauss suggests is critical in the rule of law as the ancients understood it: the sacred. It is essential that the standards we are making our own we are not just making up. As Strauss puts it, man is not thinkable "as a being that lacks sacred restraint" (192). To find dignity and purpose in obedience we must look up to what we are obeying, and if the philosopher looks up only to reason, the citizen as such must look up to an understanding of right that is prior to any consent, prior even to any claims of right, and in the best case honored as god-given.⁵ Our own founders expressed this complex embrace of reason, right, obligation, and the sacred when they proclaimed to the world the principles upon which they were throwing off the British yoke, principles of reason which they grounded in the laws of nature and of nature's God, affirmed their "reliance on the protection of Divine Providence," and pledged to one another their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

The radicalness of the ancient Socratics, their seriousness about the question of the best regime, and even or precisely their willingness to explore the shocking question of whether that regime might not be the most absolute rule of one, laid the essential foundation of their great political moderation. Strauss revives this radicalism and arrives at similarly moderate conclusions: It is possible to be a good friend to and supporter of constitutional republicanism in just this spirit. Indeed, the regime that "comes closer to what the classics demanded than any alternative that is viable in our age" is "liberal or constitutional democracy" (194–95), a moderate and stable regime such as the one we enjoy in the United States, which approximates Aristotle's mixed regime

⁵ Cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis* 3.2.13.

in combining universal franchise with the aristocratic principle of election to office and an appointed judiciary, which rests on a deeply established basic law, and which provides a deliberative process for specific legislation and reasonable discretion for intelligent leaders. Indeed, Strauss taught, constitutional republicanism can find no better source of support, guidance, and wise course-corrections than from one educated in the principles of classical political philosophy. By contrast, Machiavelli and modern political philosophy's rejection of the validity of the radical inquiry into the best regime deprived them of the classics' sober awareness of limits, and prepared the way for the radicalism not of modern thought but of modern politics, with all the misery that it has brought the world over the past century.

With Steel or Poison: Machiavelli on Conspiracy

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Abstract: Machiavelli's life, times, and writings converge on the topic of conspiracy. Yet his treatment of this topic is both more expansive and more complex than scholars have recognized. Attending to *Discourses* 3.6, among other central passages, we argue that the significance of conspiracy for Machiavelli's political thought lies in its connection to founding. In his analyses of historical conspiracies, Machiavelli shows what founding requires in practice; at the same time, the ubiquitous occurrence of conspiracies across historical and political contexts reveals the contested and contingent status of political order. Ultimately, Machiavelli depicts and analyzes conspiracies because he aims not only to investigate but also to produce new beginnings. To this end, Machiavelli deploys a novel rhetoric that challenges the reader to adopt a conspiratorial outlook, if not to become a conspirator himself.

Thomas Hobbes wrote in his verse autobiography that he and fear were born twins.¹ Had Niccolò Machiavelli used the same figure, his twin would have been conspiracy. After all, his life, times, and political writings converge on the topic of conspiracy—"that delicate, dangerous topic which so fascinated Machiavelli that he gave it the longest chapters in each of his two primary political works."² Yet his treatment of conspiracy is both more expansive

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, with Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), liv.

² Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò*

and more complex than scholars have recognized.³ In their interpretations of Machiavelli's political thought, in contradistinction to his political career, many influential commentators present conspiracy as a minor issue—a temptation for private individuals, against which Machiavelli warns, and a danger for princes and republics, for which he proposes institutional remedies.⁴ For example, Erica Benner contends that Machiavelli frowns on conspiratorial action because “conspiracies use private rather than public channels, and violent methods unregulated by laws.”⁵ Likewise, for Maurizio Viroli, the rule of law in republics can control outbursts of private ambition and thereby stamp out conspiracies before they begin.⁶

On the other hand, commentators such as Hans Baron, Mary Dietz, and Mark Hulliung have suggested that Machiavelli endorses, albeit cautiously, republican conspiracies against tyrannical elites.⁷ More recently, John McCormick has portrayed Machiavelli as a “ferocious” or “agonistic” democrat, whose political thought supports demotic conspiracies that deliver political power to the *popolo*.⁸ Examining the original texts, however, reveals that Machiavelli lauds tyrannical as well as republican conspirators. As Harvey Mansfield has remarked, conspiracies are in fact “the central events of

Machiavelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 98. See also Charles D. Tarlton, *Fortune's Circle: A Biographical Interpretation of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 117–27; and Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2015), 83.

³ A recent exception is Marco Geuna, “Machiavelli e le Congiure: La Prospettiva dei *Discorsi*,” in *Machiavelli Cinquecento: Mezzo millennio del “Principe*,” ed. Gian Mario Anselmi, Riccardo Caporali, and Carlo Galli (Milan: Mimesis, 2015). See also Claude Lefort, *Le travail de l'œuvre: Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); and J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the “Discourses on Livy”* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 162–68.

⁴ Roberto Ridolfi, *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Florence: Sansoni, 1969), 483; Gisela Bock, “Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Erica Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 373–79; Filippo Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 50–51; Mark Jurđević, “Machiavelli's Hybrid Republicanism,” *English Historical Review* 122, no. 499 (2007): 1250.

⁵ Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 377. See also Markus Fischer, *Well-Ordered License: On the Unity of Machiavelli's Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 124.

⁶ Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 127.

⁷ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Mary G. Dietz, “Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception,” *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 3 (1986): 777–99; Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*.

⁸ John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), esp. 80, 115.

Machiavellian politics”;⁹ for that reason, the topic should not be shoehorned into standing interpretations of Machiavelli’s thought.⁹

Elaborating on Mansfield’s claim, this article offers an integral account of conspiracy’s place in Machiavelli’s political understanding. In the process, we show that the topic of conspiracy runs through Machiavelli’s writings like a red skein, even receiving a stand-alone treatment in book 3, chapter 6 of the *Discourses on Livy*—the longest chapter of that masterwork and the touchstone of our inquiry.¹⁰ Through a careful examination of *Discourses* 3.6, among other passages, this article aims to illuminate Machiavelli’s “conspiracy theory.” In the first place, we attend to the panoply of historical conspiracies depicted and analyzed by Machiavelli in *Discourses* 3.6, thereby revealing both the ubiquity and the complexity of conspiracies. In Machiavelli’s account, conspiracies are everywhere, and they encompass a surprising range of human activity.

Next, and even more importantly, we argue that the significance of conspiracy for Machiavelli’s political thought lies in the striking connection that he draws between conspiracy and founding.¹¹ Machiavelli recasts founders as conspirators, while he likens the virtue of the successful conspirator to that of the founder. In his analyses of historical conspiracies, Machiavelli shows what founding requires in practice; at the same time, the ubiquitous occurrence of conspiracies across historical and political contexts reveals the contested and contingent status of political order. In Machiavelli’s account, the ideas, institutions, and practices that structure the political world are both set and overturned through conspiratorial action.

Just as Machiavelli’s writings on conspiracy—especially *Discourses* 3.6—shed light on the theoretical core of his political thought, so do they prove to have practical implications. In this essay’s final section, we argue that Machiavelli presents himself as a nonpartisan teacher or adviser to conspirators;

⁹ Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 40. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 169–70. Neither thinker, however, provides us with a systematic account of conspiracy for Machiavelli.

¹⁰ We cite *The Prince*, the *Discourses on Livy*, and the *Florentine Histories* in-text by book, chapter, and paragraph. We generally follow the Mansfield translation for *The Prince* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and the Mansfield-Tarcov translation for the *Discourses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Where we use our own translations, references are to *Opere*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, 3 vols. (Turin: Einaudi-Gallimard, 1997).

¹¹ Others who have evoked this link include Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*; Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*; Lefort, *Le travail de l’œuvre*; and Pierre Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne: Machiavel, Hobbes, Rousseau* (Paris: Payot, 1977); and most recently, Catherine H. Zuckert, *Machiavelli’s Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 216–21.

as we will see, many of his young friends and earliest readers viewed him in precisely this way. Machiavelli challenges the reader to adopt a conspiratorial outlook through a novel rhetoric designed to cultivate the reader's prudence and spirit (*animo*).¹² By theorizing and inculcating a conspiratorial outlook, Machiavelli's account of conspiracy both investigates and aims to produce new beginnings—and not simply republican or democratic beginnings.

THE UBIQUITY AND COMPLEXITY OF CONSPIRACY

That conspiracy was a ubiquitous political phenomenon in Renaissance Italy is widely acknowledged.¹³ One prominent historian refers to the period of Machiavelli's youth as the "age of conspiracies."¹⁴ In addition, scholars have emphasized the fact that Machiavelli himself had a personal connection to at least three different (anti-Medicean) conspiracies.¹⁵ Girolamo Machiavelli, his first cousin once removed, was first a political opponent of Cosimo de' Medici, then a conspirator in exile against him in 1460.¹⁶ In perhaps the most famous single event in his own life, Machiavelli was imprisoned and tortured owing to his association with the Boscoli conspiracy.¹⁷ Finally, the 1522 conspiracy arose among frequenters of the Orti Oricellari, where Machiavelli read

¹² See Eugene Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); and Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹³ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon, 1965), 35–39; Manfredi Piccolomini, *The Brutus Revival: Parricide and Tyrannicide during the Renaissance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 63–79; Elena Fasano Guarini, "Congiure 'contro alla patria' e congiure 'contro ad uno principe' nell'opera di Niccolò Machiavelli," in *Complots et conjurations dans l'Europe moderne*, ed. Yves-Marie Bercé and Elena Fasano Guarini (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1996), 9–53.

¹⁴ Ricardo Fubini, Riccardo, "L'età delle congiure: I rapporti tra Firenze e Milano dal tempo di Piero a quello di Lorenzo de' Medici (1464–78)," in *Florence and Milan: Comparisons and Relations*, ed. Craig Hugh Smyth and Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1989), 2:189–216. Similarly, Corrado Vivanti, in his notes on *Discourses* 3.6 (Machiavelli, *Opere*, 1:1074), remarks that "conspiracies were a characteristic phenomenon of Italian life between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, recurring in almost all the states of the peninsula" (translation ours).

¹⁵ Humphrey Butters, "Machiavelli and the Medici," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 64–79.

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 3:632; Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 103, 109, 121.

¹⁷ We lack a complete autobiographical account of these events, though see Ridolfi, *Vita*, 211–27; Marina Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe des Médicis," in *Les écrivains et le pouvoir en Italie à l'époque de la Renaissance*, ed. André Rochon (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1974), 84–85; and J. N. Stephens and H. C. Butters, "New Light on Machiavelli," *English Historical Review* 97, no. 382 (1982): 58–59. Machiavelli addresses them obliquely in his letters to Francesco Vettori, dated March 13 and 18, 1513 (*Opere*, 2:235–38), and in his two poems addressed to Giuliano de' Medici (*Opere*, 3:8–9).

chapters from the *Discourses*.¹⁸ Two of the leading conspirators were Zanobi Buondelmonti and Luigi Alamanni: Machiavelli dedicated his *Discourses on Livy* to the former (along with Cosimo Rucellai), while both are named as the dedicatees of Machiavelli's *Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*.

It was in those years "set between two conspiracies" that Machiavelli composed all of his major works.¹⁹ It should come as little surprise that conspiracy pervades them. The dramatization of a historical conspiracy is the subject of the minor work *Il Modo che Tenne il Duca Valentino per Ammazzar Vitellozo, Oliverotto da Fermo, il Signor Pagolo et il Duca di Gravina Orsini in Senigaglia*.²⁰ The eponymous Castruccio Castracani is both deviser and target of murderous conspiracies in Machiavelli's account of his life and sayings.²¹ As a number of scholars have observed, the plot of Machiavelli's comedy *The Mandragola* centers on what is in effect a successful conspiracy.²²

Conspiracies are even more rife in Machiavelli's major works. The *Florentine Histories* is a veritable compendium of conspiracies,²³ culminating in the final two books devoted, respectively, to narrating the conspiracy against Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan (*FH* 7) and the Pazzi conspiracy against Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother Giuliano (*FH* 8). In that same work, Machiavelli explicitly calls our attention to the significance of these conspiracies, inviting the reader to compare them to his authoritative treatment of conspiracy in *Discourses* 3.6.²⁴ The implication is that a unified view of conspiracy runs through Machiavelli's political thought.

¹⁸ Felix Gilbert, "Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari: A Study on the Origin of Modern Political Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 101–31; Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, 64; Dietz, "Trapping the Prince," 791. The Orti Oricellari also serve as the setting for Machiavelli's dialogue *The Art of War*. Jérémie Barthas views the Orti Oricellari as the base for two conspiracies: the first an aristocratic one against Piero Soderini driven by Bernardo Rucellai and reaching fruition in 1512; the second a republican one in 1522. See "Un giardino, due congiure: Gli Orti Oricellari," in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. 1, *Dalle origini al Rinascimento*, ed. Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedullà (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), 694–701.

¹⁹ Ridolfi, *Vita*, 320.

²⁰ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 1:16–22; see also *P* 7–8.

²¹ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 3:291–92.

²² *Ibid.*, 139–89. See also Theodore A. Sumberg, "La Mandragola: An Interpretation," *Journal of Politics* 23, no. 2 (1961): 320–40; Carnes Lord, "On Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," *Journal of Politics* 41, no. 3 (1979): 806–27; Michael Palmer and James F. Pontuso, "The Master Fool: The Conspiracy of Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," *Perspectives on Political Science* 25, no. 3 (1996): 124–32.

²³ See *FH* 1.25 for an account of the conspiracy by Philip IV of France against Pope Boniface VIII; *FH* 2.18–20 for rival conspiracies between White and Black Guelfs; and *FH* 2.33–37 for conspiracy of nobles against the duke of Athens. For similar passages, see *FH* 1.29, 3.14, 3.28, 4.25, 5.31, and 6.9–10.

²⁴ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 3:678.

Last but not least, Machiavelli devotes the longest chapters of both *The Prince* (19) and the *Discourses* (3.6) to the matter of conspiracy. *Discourses* 3.6 is anomalous in more than one respect. The very title of this chapter, “Of Conspiracies,” gives the impression that it can be read as an independent treatise. According to Elena Fasano Guarini, moreover, “no other chapter in the *Discourses* features such an expansive and varied range of classical sources.”²⁵ Yet, the themes of *Discourses* 3.6 are not themselves unique; rather, this text concentrates discussions that are otherwise seeded throughout Machiavelli’s major works.²⁶

Discourses 3.6 begins by echoing many of Machiavelli’s classic recommendations for princely rule put forth in *The Prince*. As in chapter 19 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises the prince to eschew “being hated by the collectivity” (*D* 3.6.2). As in chapter 3 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises the prince to “caress or crush” (*D* 3.6.2, 6.11). As in chapter 17 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises the prince to refrain from seizing his subjects’ property or their women (*D* 3.6.2). The repetition of these particular nostrums suggests that the prince can fortify his rule by learning how to prevent against conspiracy.

Indeed, *Discourses* 3.6 at first strikes a cautionary tone. Machiavelli treats conspiracy “so that princes may learn to guard themselves from these dangers and private individuals may put themselves into them more timidly” (*D* 3.6.1; see also *FH* 7.34). No wonder readers of Machiavelli have concluded, in the words of Marco Geuna, that “Machiavelli must be considered a severe critic of conspiracies.”²⁷ Yet many of the historical conspiracies dramatized and analyzed in *Discourses* 3.6 show that it is possible for private individuals to succeed as conspirators. “Everyone can do” as did the successful conspirators Nelematus of Epirus and Darius of Persia (*D* 3.6.8). By threatening to betray their discontented fellows to the prince, Nelematus and Darius were able to demand that these men join them in killing the prince at that very moment. Machiavelli concludes: “by these modes these men escaped the dangers that are borne in managing conspiracies; and whoever imitates them will always escape them” (*D* 3.6.7). Machiavelli details the approach of these successful conspirators and invites his readers to imitate their actions. Clearly, Machiavelli endorses some, albeit not all, conspiracies.²⁸

²⁵ Fasano Guarini, “Congiure,” 11 (translation ours).

²⁶ Herbert Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* (London: Bell, 1960), 93.

²⁷ Geuna, “Machiavelli e le congiure,” 199 (our translation); see also 201–2.

²⁸ On this point, see also Zuckert, *Machiavelli’s Politics*, 218; and Coby, *Machiavelli’s Romans*, 165–66.

Is Machiavelli's endorsement limited to conspiracies undertaken by citizens who seek to overthrow a prince for the sake of establishing or restoring a republic? On one hand, Machiavelli announces near the beginning of the discourse that "a very great" cause of conspiracy is "the desire to free the fatherland" from the rule of a prince (*D* 3.6.2.). Conspiracies undertaken by patriotic republicans crop up at every turn in *Discourses* 3.6—for example, the conspiracies of the Pazzi (*D* 3.6.2, 6.5, 6.13, 6.16), Pelopidas (3.6.16), and Marcus Junius Brutus (*D* 3.6.2, 6.16, 6.18).

On the other hand, since Machiavelli invites his readers to imitate the successful conspiracy of Darius, whose conspiracy delivered to him the kingdom of Persia, the prorepublican interpretation seems to be incomplete. A fortiori, Machiavelli offers impartial analyses of conspiracies "made against the fatherland" by would-be princes (*D* 3.6.19). Whereas Machiavelli had begun *Discourses* 3.6 by emphasizing "the dangers" posed by conspiracy for both conspirators and princes alike in the context of a principality, he goes on to argue that "conspiracies that are made against the fatherland are less dangerous for the ones who make them than are those against princes" (*D* 3.6.19). For the republican citizen who is at the same time "prince of an army, as was Caesar, or Agathocles, or Cleomenes...the way is very easy and very secure" (*D* 3.6.19). So far is Machiavelli from condemning tyrannical conspiracies undertaken within republics that he declines to indict such conspiracies and instead trumpets their feasibility.

Conspiracy, then, is a permanent feature of political life, not least in republics. Consider that Machiavelli recounts myriad conspiratorial threats to the integrity of the Roman Republic (e.g., *D* 1.5, 1.16, 1.17, 1.33, 1.46, 1.52, 2.28, 3.8, 3.28, 3.30, and 3.49). According to Machiavelli, Rome needed to secure itself against its own conspiratorial citizens not only in the beginning, as in the case of the sons of Brutus (*D* 1.16.4, 3.2–3), but "every day" (*D* 3.49.1). In fact, Machiavelli locates the "greatness" of Rome in its "executions" of conspirators (*D* 3.8.1)—whether the conspirators were members of the elite such as Manlius Capitolinus (*D* 3.1.3, 3.8.1, 3.28) or "multitudes of the erring," as in the massive conspiracies of the Roman women and of the Bacchanals (*D* 3.49.1).

Nor did the Romans simply take a dim view of conspiracies. Strikingly, Machiavelli suggests that the Romans themselves conspired against other states. In *Discourses* 2.32, he says that the Romans tried every approach to conquest, including "conspiracy" (*D* 2.32.1). While Machiavelli grants that the Romans did not rely on conspiracies in order "to seize towns" because conspiracies are too "uncertain," he nevertheless gives an example of a Roman

conspiracy that issued in the conquest of Palaepolis, which the Romans took through a combination of “furtive violence” and “a treaty with those inside” (*D* 2.32.1). How does the conspiracy at Palaepolis differ at all from the characteristic Roman approach to expansionist warfare—which consisted of making “partners” or “accords” through “deception,” which Machiavelli applauds (*D* 2.4, 2.13)?

More cautiously, since Machiavelli repeatedly remarks that the Roman republic grew stronger by overpowering its neighbors when they “conspired” against the empire (*D* 1.33.1, 2.2.3, 2.4.1, 3.11.1; *FH* 1.29), he admits the possibility of conspiracies not only within but among states (see *D* 3.6.7, 6.16). A central lesson of *Discourses* 3.6 is the ubiquity and complexity of conspiracies: plots are hatched and executed in principalities and republics, on the battlefield, and even in various venues that might seem sub- or transpolitical—from the bedroom of Commodus (*D* 3.6.10) to the gardens of Piso (*D* 3.6.8) to the Duomo of Florence (*D* 3.6.13; *FH* 8.5).

Yet to say that Machiavelli views conspiracy as a ubiquitous and complex political phenomenon raises many questions. What are the distinguishing features of a conspiracy? More importantly, can we explain why Machiavelli lingers on the topic of conspiracy in *Discourses* 3.6, not to mention other central passages? What is the significance of conspiracy for Machiavelli?

CONSPIRACY AND FOUNDING

Conspiracy is not just a wider phenomenon in Machiavelli’s writings than scholars have allowed, but also a deeper one—indeed, it goes right to the foundations of political life. A striking feature of *Discourses* 3.6 is Machiavelli’s claim that the most exemplary conspirators work alone (*D* 3.6.6–7). Pitkin observes that on Machiavelli’s presentation of “successful conspiracy...the number of participants should be kept to a minimum; best of all is the solitary plotter who involves others only at the last moment.”²⁹ Claude Lefort is even more emphatic: the Machiavellian conspirator “must be alone and assume his solitude.”³⁰ According to a conventional understanding of conspiracy, however, conspiracy defines a secret plot among multiple conspirators to use violence for the sake of changing the regime or seizing political power. The very term *congiura* derives from the verb *congiurare*, which literally means

²⁹ Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, 20.

³⁰ Lefort, *Le travail de l’œuvre*, 617–18.

“to swear together”; intrigue seems to be essential to conspiracy.³¹ Machiavelli himself writes early in *Discourses* 3.6: “With one individual, it cannot be said that it is a conspiracy, but a firm disposition arisen in one man to kill the prince” (*D* 3.6.2). Yet in the same chapter Machiavelli goes on to say that, at least in the republican context, “a citizen can order himself for power without making his mind and his plan manifest to anyone” (*D* 3.6.19). Is it not paradoxical, or at least unusual, to describe conspiracy as the action of a solitary individual?

How a conspirator can proceed by himself, and why Machiavelli emphasizes this fact, becomes clear in his portraits of successful conspirators. In Machiavelli’s presentation, both Nelematus and Darius forced their confederates to accede to their plans by threatening to betray them to their would-be victims—effectively making them an offer they could not refuse. Lefort explains: “the conspirator may be forced to seek support: he must under no circumstances depend on others.”³² The decisive, independent, and threatening actions of Nelematus and Darius transformed their accomplices into subjects compelled to carry out their commands, rather than independent actors capable of ruining the scheme (*D* 3.6.11).³³ Alternatively put, successful conspirators must conspire against their coconspirators in order truly to stand alone. Since the solitariness of the conspirator reflects his self-reliance, the conspirator evokes the greatest founders, the “armed prophets” of *The Prince*, whom Machiavelli also characterizes as solitary because self-sufficient (*P* 6).³⁴

We suggest that the conspirator may be seen as a nonmythical link to the founder. Machiavelli’s founders are all figures out of legendary pasts.³⁵ But when Machiavelli turns to analogous historical figures, such as Cleomenes (*D* 1.9.4, 1.18.5, 3.6.19), Hiero (*P* 6), Agathocles (*P* 8; *D* 2.13.1, 3.6.19), and Septimius Severus (*P* 19), they come to light not only as “tyrants who enrich and arm the people,” as McCormick has shown, but also, and especially, as

³¹ Similarly, “to conspire” arises out of the Latin *conspirare*—literally, “to breathe together.” See Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 2.1.100.

³² Lefort, *Le travail de l’œuvre*, 617 (“le conspirateur peut être contraint de chercher des appuis, il ne doit en aucun cas dépendre d’autrui”).

³³ Machiavelli even claims that this design could have brought success to the Pisonian conspiracy against Emperor Nero (*D* 3.6.8).

³⁴ Cf. Machiavelli’s argument in *P* 17 that the self-sufficient prince should first and foremost cultivate his subjects’ fear of him rather than their love because the former emotion is more easily controlled and manipulated.

³⁵ Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 77.

conspirators.³⁶ If, in the words of Louis Althusser, Machiavelli is the “theorist of beginnings,” then it is through his dramatizations of and reflections on conspiracy that we come to understand what beginnings really entail.³⁷

For example, Machiavelli draws a direct connection between the Spartan conspirator Cleomenes and Rome’s first founder, Romulus. In *Discourses* 1.9, Machiavelli writes that “it never or rarely happens that any republic or kingdom is ordered well from the beginning or reformed altogether anew outside its old orders unless it is ordered by one individual” (*D* 1.9.2). While Romulus is Machiavelli’s exemplar in this passage, later in the chapter he focuses on Cleomenes, whose conspiracy aimed to refound Sparta: “he took a convenient opportunity, had all the ephors and anyone else who might be able to stand against him killed, and then renewed altogether the laws of Lycurgus” (*D* 1.9.4). Nine chapters later, Machiavelli returns to Romulus and Cleomenes, extolling both individuals, without distinction, for their use of “extraordinary modes” and “violence and arms” in order to (re-)found their states (*D* 1.18.5; see also 1.17 and 1.55). A similar identification of the founder with the conspirator occurs in chapter 6 of *The Prince*. To the pantheon of armed prophets—Romulus, Moses, Cyrus, and Theseus—Machiavelli adds the “lesser example” of Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse (*P* 6). While Machiavelli’s main point is that Hiero used his own arms and virtue to acquire and reorder Syracuse, Machiavelli subsequently reveals that Hiero came to power through a conspiracy—employing mercenaries to seize control of Syracuse and then brutally cutting them to pieces while claiming political power for himself (*P* 13).

Just as conspirators may become founders, so too successful founders prove to be conspirators. In one of his rare substantial treatments of a founder, Machiavelli portrays Cyrus the Great as a master conspirator (*D* 2.13).³⁸ In this chapter, Machiavelli almost imperceptibly moves from descriptions of deceptive actions undertaken by Cyrus against foreign enemies, to deceptive actions

³⁶ John P. McCormick, “Machiavelli’s Inglorious Tyrants: On Agathocles, Scipio, and Unmerited Glory,” *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 1 (2015): 51.

³⁷ Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* (London: Verso, 1999), 6; see also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 38.

³⁸ Cf. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 4.2–5. Although Machiavelli refers to Xenophon’s account of Cyrus in this discourse, he may also have Herodotus’s Cyrus in mind. For whereas according to Xenophon Cyrus is raised, lovingly, by his Median grandfather Astyages, Herodotus’s narrative pits Cyrus and Astyages against each other (Herodotus 1.107–30). Herodotus reports that Astyages ordered Cyrus exposed as an infant (like the other armed prophets of *P* 6); eventually, moreover, Cyrus comes to rule the Medes through the conquest of Astyages. That Xenophon himself refers to Herodotus’s more deflationary portrait of Cyrus supports the possibility that Machiavelli was familiar with both texts.

undertaken by Cyrus against his uncle the king (who, according to Xenophon, dies of natural causes without losing his formal position), to usurpative actions undertaken by Gian Galeazzo Visconti against his uncle (who loses both his position and his life in the process).³⁹ It makes sense, in fact, that a founder would need to engage in conspiracy for two reasons. As Machiavelli makes clear in his discussion of Cyrus, all new princes begin as private citizens (*D* 2.13.1). Lacking arms at the beginning of his career, the founder must ascend, like Agathocles, “not only from a private fortune but from a mean and abject one” (*P* 7). Thus Machiavelli picks out fraud as the most important mode of action for conspirator and founder alike.⁴⁰ As he says in his discussion of Cyrus: “Nor do I believe that force alone is ever found to be enough, but fraud alone will be found to be quite enough” (*D* 2.13.1).⁴¹

Second, once founders have acquired their states through conspiratorial action, they must then conspire against potential conspirators in order to secure their new order. As Frederick Whelan puts the point, “the problems of ruling and of conspiring are similar for Machiavelli insofar as both involve the need for secrecy and deception.”⁴² The original conspiracy that brings the conspirator to power serves as training for the challenges of maintaining his state. Interestingly, the same lesson on conspiracy as preparation for ruling applies even to a republican leader. Why, after all, does Machiavelli take up the subject of conspiracy in book 3 of the *Discourses*, in which he aims “to demonstrate to anyone how much the actions of particular men made Rome great” (*D* 3.1.6)? The most straightforward answer is that Machiavelli’s general inquiry into conspiracy arises out of his analysis in the preceding passages (*D* 3.2–5) of two Roman conspiracies that occurred at the birth of the republic: first, the conspiracy of Lucius Junius Brutus; second, the conspiracy of Brutus’s sons. Machiavelli portrays Brutus as a conspirator, even as the consummate conspirator. In *Discourses* 3.2, he writes of Brutus: “there was never anyone so prudent nor esteemed so wise for any eminent work of his than Junius Brutus deserves to be held in his simulation of stupidity”—a guise Brutus put on so as “to be less observed and to have more occasion for

³⁹ See *FH* 1.27. This last example cannot but remind one of another Lombard named Gian Galeazzo, whose position vis-à-vis his uncle was reversed (*FH* 8.26, 8.36).

⁴⁰ Manent, *Naissances de la politique moderne*, 19–20; Garver, *Machiavelli and the History of Prudence*, 86–91.

⁴¹ Cf. Francesco Guicciardini, *Opere inedite*, ed. Piero and Luigi Guicciardini, vol. 1 (Florence: Barbera, Bianchi, e Comp., 1857), 66–67.

⁴² Frederick G. Whelan, *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 168.

crushing the kings and freeing his own fatherland” (*D* 3.2.1).⁴³ The Roman Republic was founded through the conspiracy of Brutus against the Tarquin kings. And it was preserved, as the next chapter shows, by crushing those who were first to conspire against the republic, namely, the sons of Brutus (*D* 3.3; see also 1.16.4). Thus Machiavelli celebrates Lucius Junius Brutus not only for founding the Roman Republic, but also, and especially, for discovering the conspiracy of his own sons and overseeing their execution (*D* 1.16.4, 3.3). From this example Machiavelli draws the lesson: “whoever takes up a tyranny and does not kill Brutus, and whoever makes a free state and does not kill the sons of Brutus, maintains himself for little time” (*D* 3.3).

Even before Brutus, Machiavelli’s Moses had taught himself this lesson: “since he wished his laws and his orders to go forward, Moses was forced to kill infinite men...who were opposed to his plans” (*D* 3.30.1). Consider, in addition, Machiavelli’s discussion of how the prince can secure himself against conspiracies in chapter 19 of *The Prince*. Machiavelli holds up Septimius Severus as a “new prince,” whose security rested on his reputation for fraud, which was itself born of the brilliant three-pronged conspiracy that won Severus the emperorship (*P* 19). Severus’s conspiracy had the effect of “killing the sons of Brutus”: no one dared conspire against an emperor who held a reputation for consummate skill in conspiracy. Agathocles also emerges as an example of a conspirator-founder who “kept to a life of crime at every rank of his career,” yet was “never conspired against by his citizens” (*P* 7). Why Agathocles never faced a conspiracy Machiavelli explains with reference to Agathocles’s ability to use cruelty well. In short, Agathocles eliminated potential conspirators before they could plot against him. Thus a new prince may be said to be engaged in a lifelong conspiracy to maintain his rule.⁴⁴

Viewed together, the examples of Brutus, Moses, Severus, and Agathocles show that a new prince or a new “prince of a republic” (*D* 1.33.1; see also 1.12.1, 1.18.4) should conspire against the enemies of his fledgling regime in order to beat potential conspirators to the punch. Notice that this list of figures reveals conspiracy to be the link between republics and principalities. That is, princes need constantly fear republican conspirators, and republics need

⁴³ This claim entails a significant alteration to Livy’s text, as argued at length in Thomas L. Pangle and Timothy W. Burns, *The Key Texts of Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 193–95.

⁴⁴ Machiavelli’s first example of a “new prince” in *The Prince* is Francesco Sforza, who ascended to power through a conspiracy against the Golden Ambrosian Republic of Milan; see *P* 1 and *FH* 5.13.

fear princely ones. But conspiracy is more than a conceptual link between principalities and republics insofar as both remain ineluctably susceptible to conspiracies. Conspiratorial action bridges the gap between the two states, when a conspirator transforms one into the other. Indeed, in Machiavelli's reworking of the Polybian cycle of regimes at the beginning of the *Discourses*, "plots and conspiracies" are the cause of regime change (*D* 1.2.3).⁴⁵

Thus conspiracy's significance for Machiavelli's political thought has to do with the way it exposes the "effectual truth" about founding and maintaining new modes and orders.⁴⁶ Political institutions and practices are not given by nature or God; they are wrought instead by the hands of conspirators, who use fraud to acquire and maintain political power. At the same time, Machiavelli suggests that the specter of conspiracy haunts every established political authority. Recognizing this fact, and anticipating future threats, the greatest founders have killed the sons of Brutus. Putting these points another way, every successful conspiracy has the potential to found a new state; conversely, to crush a conspiracy is to reinforce the existing system of rule.⁴⁷

A MACHIAVELLIAN EDUCATION IN CONSPIRACY

In light of conspiracy's thematic importance for Machiavelli, the question arises: Was Machiavelli a teacher of conspirators? That the *Discourses* are addressed to a man, Zanobi Buondelmonti, who would eventually conspire against the Medici in 1522, suggests that Machiavelli knew that his audience was interested in conspiracy as a practical possibility. What's more, in *Discourses* 3.6, Machiavelli playfully invites the reader to contemplate the dangers of writing on conspiracy: "Everyone should guard himself from writing as from a reef, for there is nothing that convicts you more easily than what is written by your hand" (*D* 3.6.8).⁴⁸ One of the attendees at the Orti Oricellari, Jacopo Nardi, attributes at least some blame for the Rucellai Gardens conspiracy of 1522 to Machiavelli, given the influence that Machiavelli exercised

⁴⁵ See also Nathan Tarcov, "Law and Innovation in Machiavelli's *Prince*," in *Enlightening Revolutions: Essays in Honor of Ralph Lerner*, ed. Svetozar Minkov and Stéphane Douard (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 87; and Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 85.

⁴⁶ In his introductory lines to chapter 15 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli speaks of the importance of *andare dretto alla verità effettuale della cosa*—going behind what is imagined to the effectual truth of the matter (*Opere*, 1:159). Not coincidentally, perhaps, *dietrologia* (from *dietro*, the modern Italian word for "behind") is a contemporary colloquial expression for "conspiracy theory."

⁴⁷ See Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 195.

⁴⁸ This line has particular force, since the presence of Machiavelli's name on a list taken from the Boscoli conspirators led to his own arrest and subsequent torture.

over those youths and the esteem in which they held his writings.⁴⁹ Another, Filippo de' Nerli, renders a more balanced judgment: that a proper reading of Machiavelli would have either halted a conspiracy or resulted in a more prudent attempt.⁵⁰ In addition to the judgments of Nardi and Nerli, one may recall Machiavelli's own claim in the *Florentine Histories* that the conspiracy against the duke of Milan was originally motivated by a humanist tutor who taught the superiority of ancient republics over modern princes (*FH* 7.33).

A number of modern scholars have argued that Machiavelli was indeed such a teacher. To hear Mark Hulliung tell it, *Discourses* 3.6 outlines "the method of conducting successful conspiracy" for the benefit of Florentine republicans, who might use this method to overthrow the Medici and refound the republic.⁵¹ Erica Benner takes the opposite view: Machiavelli delivers "a cautionary message" in *Discourses* 3.6; his examples of failed conspiracies prove that the risks involved in conspiring almost always outweigh the potential gains for the conspirators themselves and the state alike.⁵²

Benner approaches the question of the practical import of *Discourses* 3.6 in the appropriate way, by looking at Machiavelli's own examples. Surveying these examples, she correctly notes the inescapable riskiness of conspiracy. The extraordinary dramatis personae of *Discourses* 3.6 were involved, predominantly, in failed conspiracies—from the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (*D* 3.6.8) to Brutus's conspiracy against Caesar (*D* 3.6.16) to the conspiracy of Hanno the Great against the Carthaginian republic (*D* 3.6.19) to the conspiracy of the Pazzi against the Medici (*D* 3.6.13). Yet Benner goes too far when she writes that "the conclusion drawn at the end of every example is that it is almost impossible to succeed," and that examples of successful conspiracies are celebrated by writers "as a thing rare and almost without example."⁵³ In addition to those of Nelematus and Darius (*D* 3.6.7, 6.11), Machiavelli points to the successful conspiracies undertaken by Jacopo d'Appiano (*D* 3.6.3), Marcia the mistress of Commodus (*D* 3.6.10), Macrinus the prefect to Caracalla (*D* 3.6.11), Alexamenus (*D* 3.6.7, 6.15), Pelopidas,

⁴⁹ Iacopo Nardi, *Istorie delle Città di Firenze*, ed. Lelio Arbib, vol. 2 (Florence: Soc. Editrice delle Storie del Nardi e del Varchi, 1838–41), 77.

⁵⁰ Filippo de' Nerli, *Commentarj de' fatti civili occorsi dentro la città di Firenze dall'anno MCCXV al MDXXXVII* (Florence: Apresso David Raimondo Mertz e Gio. Jacopo Majer, 1728), 138.

⁵¹ Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, 94–95. Cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 168–70.

⁵² Benner, *Machiavelli's Ethics*, 373–77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 374.

Agathocles, Cleomenes, and Caesar himself (*D* 3.6.19). What is more, he holds these up as examples to be imitated (*D* 3.6.8, 3.9).

At the same time, Machiavelli hardly promises success to the conspirator who understands and acts on the advice of *Discourses* 3.6. True, Machiavelli notes, as rules of thumb, the modes that bring success to conspirators on balance—for example, “not to give time to the conspirators to accuse you” (*D* 3.6.6) and “not to communicate the thing to anyone” (*D* 3.6.9). But these guidelines do not amount to a method; for Machiavelli includes examples of successful conspiracies that flout these rules of thumb. The conspiracies of Alexamenus and the Aetolians against Nabis the Spartan tyrant, in addition to the conspiracy of Pelopidas against the tyrants of Thebes, involved whole armies and unfolded over extended periods of time (*D* 3.6.7, 6.16). Even the Pisonian and Pazzi conspiracies did not fail as a result of the large number of confidants with knowledge of the plots (*D* 3.6.5). No method could account for every inconvenience that threatens to expose the plot—the greatest danger for the conspirator (*D* 3.6.4)—or to disrupt its execution. Machiavelli notes that conspiracies led by republican military leaders “have had various outcomes according to fortune”: even among conspiracies of this type, which are most of all likely to succeed, there is no guarantee of success (*D* 3.6.19). At the conclusion of *Discourses* 3.6, Machiavelli himself acknowledges that a reader looking for a method of conspiracy will have been disappointed, since many practical questions facing the conspirator—whether to use steel or poison, for example—Machiavelli has declined to answer (*D* 3.6.20).

That Machiavelli offers no method of successful conspiracy in *Discourses* 3.6 is consistent with his overall approach to considering conspiracy, since he had offered no method of preventing conspiracies in chapter 19 of *The Prince*. True, in the latter text, Machiavelli initially identifies the people’s love of the prince as the great bulwark against conspiracy. But that advice is immediately qualified by Machiavelli’s example of a prince who was both loved by the people and killed by conspirators—namely, Annibale Bentivoglio of Bologna. Equally important, by the conclusion of the chapter, Machiavelli has shown that the Roman emperor Septimius Severus guarded against conspiracies by satisfying the Roman soldiers, not the people. Yet, lest one take Severus’s example as a general illustration of avoiding conspiracy, Machiavelli has already drawn our attention (in *P* 19) to the case of Severus’s son, Antoninus Caracalla, murdered by one of his own soldiers.

Why, then, does Machiavelli eschew a methodical account of successful conspiracy in *Discourses* 3.6? “To present a series of precepts to be followed

and examples to be imitated would be to encourage a passive sort of learning, perhaps adequate for acting in a world ruled by timeless custom, but ill-adapted to the world of changing particulars Machiavelli describes.”⁵⁴ Machiavelli does not draw hard and fast conclusions about why, how, or when it makes sense to conspire; the reader will have to think through these questions for himself. Rather, Machiavelli hopes to inculcate in the would-be conspirator a certain cast of character or a set of virtues—in particular, prudence and spirit. These are the characteristics that mark successful conspirators in *Discourses* 3.6, and they are notable for their absence among those who fail (*D* 3.6.14; see also *FH* 3.13).

Prudence is the keynote of *Discourses* 3.6. As Claude Lefort has noted, Machiavelli “trains the young to stand against the *impeto* of the adversary and to study his features, to prepare their response, and to commit a slow and prudent conspiracy.”⁵⁵ Its importance is highlighted by Machiavelli’s claim that if certain conspirators only “knew how to do this wickedness with prudence, it would be impossible that they not succeed” (*D* 3.6.3). What constitutes Machiavellian prudence? Recall that Machiavelli emphasizes the prudence of Nelematus and Darius and invites “any prudent individual” to imitate their approach to conspiracy (*D* 3.6.6). In so doing, Machiavelli signals one important aspect of prudence—intellectual self-reliance. Prudence demands self-possession of the kind that allowed Nelematus, Darius, Brutus, and others to prepare their conspiracies by themselves, and to manage the emotions of their fellow conspirators. Failure awaits conspirators who fail to control their emotions, such as Quintianus, who conspired against Emperor Commodus, and Antonio da Volterra, who conspired against Lorenzo de’ Medici (*D* 3.6.15). Like the multitude that Machiavelli criticizes in *Discourses* 1.44, these conspirators announced their intentions at the crucial moment, when it was the successful execution of their conspiracies that would have “satisfied their appetite.”

Machiavellian prudence encompasses, in addition, timely and flexible deliberation unencumbered by ethical constraints.⁵⁶ As Machiavelli writes in the twenty-first chapter of *The Prince*: “prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the qualities of the inconveniences, and picking the least bad as good” (*P* 21). Above all, prudence involves knowing, at all times, whether to

⁵⁴ Eugene Garver, “Machiavelli’s *The Prince*: A Neglected Rhetorical Classic,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 13, no. 2 (1980): 101.

⁵⁵ Lefort, *Le travail de l’œuvre*, 678.

⁵⁶ Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, 31.

temporize or to strike—the same quality necessary for princes or republics who wish to escape conspiracies (*D* 1.33.5, 3.6.20). For conspirators cannot let their intentions be known, and their targets cannot let it be known that they know, until they are prepared to act. Prudence is also required for managing this precarious condition, during which one must dissemble one's intentions lest the enterprise be ruined (*D* 3.6.19–20; *P* 18). Not for the first time, Lucius Junius Brutus is the example par excellence; it was, after all, the long act of dissembling that allowed him to overthrow the Tarquins (cf. *D* 3.2 with Livy 1.56).

But prudence alone is not enough: one cannot strike at the right time and without hesitation unless one possesses spirit. In his account of the failed Pazzi conspiracy in *Florentine Histories* 8.5, Machiavelli declares: “if ever in any matter one looks for a great and firm spirit made resolute in both life and death through many experiences, it is necessary to have it in this, where it is seen very many times that men skilled in arms and soaked in blood are lacking in spirit.”⁵⁷ The word *animo* occurs with unique frequency and concentration in *Discourses* 3.6.⁵⁸ According to Mansfield, “*animo* is indispensable in conspiracies...in which it is required for overcoming inhibitions, for steeling oneself to the performance of actions one can see are necessary but may not have the nerve for.”⁵⁹ Conspiracy is where even formidable men and women prove inadequate in the breach.⁶⁰ In *The Prince*, Machiavelli goes so far as to say that it is impossible for a prince to prevent assassination by a spirited enemy; the prince's only consolation is that such men are “most rare” (*P* 19).

Machiavelli initially attributes a lack of spirit, per convention, to cowardice (*D* 3.6.14), but then drops any mention of this. The greater problem is reverence: those not otherwise possessed of physical fear are nonetheless overawed, either by the majesty of their would-be victims or by the moral magnitude of their deeds (*D* 3.6.12–15). It is a hard thing for most to kill a man, at least initially, as evidenced by the failure of his brothers to kill Alfonso, duke of Ferrara (*D* 3.6.14). And it appears even harder in a religious setting: Machiavelli attributes part of the failure of the Pazzi conspiracy to Giovambatista da Montesecco's unwillingness to commit a murder in church (*D* 3.6.13).⁶¹ The ultimate reverence that interferes with conspiracy is not just

⁵⁷ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 3:685.

⁵⁸ Michelle Tolman Clarke, “On the Woman Question in Machiavelli,” *Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005): 240–41.

⁵⁹ Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 40.

⁶⁰ See Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 285.

⁶¹ Note that the word in Italian for pity and piety is the same (*pietà*).

for man and man's laws but God and His laws (cf. *D* 1.27). But lest one view Christianity as the chief obstacle to a successful conspiracy, it is necessary to acknowledge the many pre-Christian conspiracies that failed.⁶² In the same passage as his discussion of the Pazzi conspiracy, Machiavelli ascribes to reverence the failure of a slave to murder Gaius Marius (*D* 3.6.14). Throughout the centuries, reverence is a fundamental pitfall for the Machiavellian conspirator. Unwavering *animo* therefore requires *prudenzia*—namely, the kind of intellectual self-reliance that replaces conventional piety.⁶³

But the surest means of stiffening one's spirit is to have experience in conspiracy. "For of spirit in great things there is no one who may promise himself a sure thing without having had experience" (*D* 3.6.15; see also 3.38). This is what separates Lucius Junius Brutus from his descendant,⁶⁴ as well as from such figures as Cicero (*D* 1.52.3) and Machiavelli's unfortunate fellow Florentine Piero Soderini (*D* 1.52.2, 3.3).⁶⁵ The earlier Brutus had in effect prepared himself to conspire by conspiring—specifically, by dissembling. And his conspiracy against the Tarquins prepared him to defend the nascent republic against conspiracies in turn (*D* 3.2–3, 39). Paradoxically, one prepares for or against conspiracies by having already conspired oneself. The difficulty lies in preparing oneself to conspire without already having done so.

In lieu of concrete, practical experience, one may have mental experience. It is possible to think and see the world as a conspirator and thereby to prepare for action (cf. *P* 14). Machiavelli's texts could instruct and prepare the reader for politics as conspiracy by honing his prudence and steeling his spirit. "Correct imitation accordingly involves imitating and realizing a flexible principle of prudential judgment.... And this in turn gives rise to texts designed to dramatize and inculcate such judgment, whose rhetoric is, therefore, not ornamental but strategic."⁶⁶ Machiavelli's writings on conspiracy educate would-be conspirators so that they may seize their opportunity.

⁶² Cf. Harvey C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the "Discourses on Livy"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979).

⁶³ Whether this form of intellectual autonomy amounts to a philosophic stance is much debated in the scholarship on Machiavelli; though cf. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 295–99.

⁶⁴ Lefort, *Le travail de l'œuvre*, 641–42.

⁶⁵ Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics*, 221 also notes the contrast between Brutus and Soderini. That Cicero had already responded effectively (and illegally!) to the second Catilinarian conspiracy only underscores the significance of conspiracy as a recurring danger.

⁶⁶ Victoria Kahn, "Virtù and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Representations* 13 (1986): 64.

CONCLUSION: CONSPIRACY AND POLITICS

For all that scholars have written on the historical conspiracies that shaped Machiavelli's life and times, they have not explained the complex and highly significant account of this topic found in his political thought. Why has conspiracy's significance for Machiavelli been insufficiently recognized? Perhaps the paucity of treatments of *Discourses* 3.6 is part and parcel of a larger ambivalence concerning the third book of the *Discourses*.⁶⁷ For this book is least congenial to our approach to political matters. Whereas book 1 signals its focus on "public decisions" concerning matters inside the city,⁶⁸ and book 2 on "deliberations" pertaining to the enlargement of the empire,⁶⁹ the third book is nominally devoted to "demonstrating...how much the actions of particular men made Rome great and caused in that city many good effects."⁷⁰ Book 3 deals with private and even secret decisions, which, as Machiavelli announces near the beginning of the *Discourses*, animate half of the city's works (*D* 1.1). The importance of decisions undertaken in private, of which conspiracy represents the most dangerous expression, poses an obvious problem for proponents of civic-republican and democratic readings of Machiavelli.⁷¹ Whatever the differences among these interpretative approaches, they share certain presuppositions about the arena of political conduct. To put it idiomatically, they agree that politics happens in plain sight, within the "public sphere," as circumscribed by laws and institutions, if not by moral expectations or rules.

However, the connection Machiavelli draws between conspiracy and founding locates many of the most consequential moments of contestation and change outside the boundaries of political life narrowly or traditionally conceived. As regards Rome, at least, what happened in the bedroom of Lucretia or on the battlefields of Gaul proved as consequential as any speech delivered by a consul or senator. These ostensibly private or foreign affairs precipitated the conspiracies of Lucius Junius Brutus and of Caesar, which shaped Rome's history and political order in far-reaching ways. The ubiquity of conspiracy therefore blurs key conceptual distinctions between the

⁶⁷ Though cf. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans*.

⁶⁸ Machiavelli, *Opere*, 1:202.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁷¹ Zuckert, *Machiavelli's Politics* is in some ways an exception, as it presents a qualified republican reading of Machiavelli in which the darker aspects of politics remain very much present, with conspiracy an enduring threat that republics must understand if they are to prevent it.

public, the private, the domestic, and the foreign. By attending to the actions of solitary plotters like Nelematus and Darius, Machiavelli lays bare what he considers an essential truth about politics: conspiracy represents the most acute practical manifestation of the fundamental fluidity and malleability of political order. Conspiracies operate independently of any rule-governed behavior and, if successful, entail a rewriting of the rules themselves.

Learning to think and see the world like a conspirator is to recognize and internalize this truth. For one must be able to identify both the opportunity for conspiracy and the threat of it and to meet such moments with prudence and spirit. It is in this sense that Machiavelli's pedagogy of conspiracy amounts to a preparation for facing the vicissitudes of politics. We have tried to show that Machiavelli challenges his ambitious readers to conspire, to undertake those violent and deceptive actions on the margins that have the power to effect the greatest change. In so doing, Machiavelli indicated his own profound discontent with the status quo—not least with the Christian “mode of life” (see *D* 3.31) that encouraged reverence and hence discouraged the prudence and spirit that both conspiracy and political rule demand. It is these virtues, rather than any method, that provide the basis for success as Machiavelli defines it. As for who will manifest them, Machiavelli himself reminds us that anyone can seize the opportunity to conspire.

Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*. Translated by Stuart D Warner and Stéphane Douard. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2017, 340 pp., \$28 (cloth).

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Montesquieu is widely recognized for his contributions to the modern philosophic project and American institutional design; as one commentator has succinctly put it, Montesquieu's reputation is typically that of a "Frenchified Locke."¹ He is not, however, usually thought of as a poet. If anything, Montesquieu is sometimes seen as the last gasp of Enlightenment rationalism before the first modern poet-philosopher, Rousseau, exploded onto the intellectual scene to tear the Enlightenment edifice down in the name of beauty, freedom, and virtue.

Yet Montesquieu's actual body of work complicates this narrative. Those familiar with his biography know that Montesquieu was a literary celebrity before he was known as a political thinker: it was the instant success of his epistolary novel *Persian Letters* in 1721 that propelled him into the public eye. At key moments in his magnum opus, *The Spirit of the Laws*, one finds Montesquieu comparing himself to a sculptor and to the painter Caravaggio, and even writing an Invocation to the Muses.² In fact, an overview of his collected works reveals nearly as many works of fiction—and especially fiction dealing with erotic themes—as ostensibly serious works of political philosophy.³ In short, Montesquieu's reputation may be in need of revision:

¹ Diana J. Schaub, *Erotic Liberalism: Women and Revolution in Montesquieu's "Persian Letters"* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), ix.

² For the comparison with a sculptor and with Caravaggio, see the Preface to *The Spirit of the Laws*. The Invocation to the Muses can be found at the beginning of part 4 of the work.

³ It will be admitted that these works of fiction, while surprisingly numerous, are not always of the highest quality. See, for instance, the salacious but trite *Temple of Gnide*.

any comprehensive treatment of Montesquieu's work must grapple with both his rationalist and poetic sides.

No work showcases Montesquieu's literary genius better than *Persian Letters*, his first, and best, artistic effort. *Persian Letters* is an epistolary novel that follows two Persians, Usbek and Rica, as they leave Persia and experience France—perhaps to satiate a genuine love of wisdom (1) or perhaps to flee persecution at court (8). In part, *Persian Letters* is a book satirizing France. During their time in France, the Persians are constantly struck by the vanity of the French people and absurdity of much of French life. As they are foreigners—not to mention Muslims—they are able to speak more boldly, irreverently, and anticlerically than Montesquieu ever does in his own name. One thinks of a particularly bold instance where Rica bluntly calls the pope “an old idol worshipped out of habit” (29). In Montesquieu's hands, the foreignness of the Persians is a weapon expertly employed to satirize what no Frenchman dare openly ridicule.

However, the main drama of the book occurs not in France, but in Persia. When Usbek left Persia, he left behind a seraglio of wives, guarded by a bevy of both physically and spiritually mutilated eunuchs. Although time and distance separate Usbek from his wives, his jealous obsession with them only seems to grow, as do their attempts to resist his despotic regime. The disintegration of order in Usbek's seraglio, and Usbek's corresponding psychological descent into obsession, misery, and denial, is the dramatic core of the book. Montesquieu uses Usbek's brutal household regime to create a vivid portrait of the psychology of despotism, and the spiritual violence the regime inflicts on both the ruler and the ruled.

This brief description, however, does not capture what makes *Persian Letters* such a joy to read. In one way only, *Persian Letters* is like a meringue: it is far less light than it may seem. The work is so witty, playful, and occasionally salacious that it can feel like pulp fiction; meanwhile, however, almost imperceptibly, the book takes on a dizzying thematic and structural complexity. Especially in the latter part of the book, one begins to find letters within letters, characters spinning myths, and subtle networks of relationships between the characters, revealed without a word, often by discrepancies in the text and silences more than anything said explicitly. Thematically, one sees Montesquieu address the weightiest of topics: nature and convention, the possibility of a philosophic life, happiness, vanity, women, Eros, and nearly all of the substantial philosophic themes that one can find in his overtly

serious works. Without ever losing its playfulness, *Persian Letters* provides an intellectual feast for serious readers.

However, until now, the same complexity and style that makes the work so fascinating has erected barriers between English-language readers and the text. When so much is held together with such delicacy, when only the thinnest linguistic thread (such as the multiple meanings of the word *jalousie*) creates an important thematic link between two otherwise disparate-seeming letters, the task of a translator can be daunting. In their fine new translation of *Persian Letters*, Stuart D. Warner and Stéphane Douard have risen admirably to the occasion. They have produced a superlative scholarly edition that masterfully captures Montesquieu's elusive style. Warner and Douard also provide helpful tools for those reading the book in any language, including the original French. These include a detailed explanation of Montesquieu's rather oblique system for dating the letters, a chart that juxtaposes the order in which the letters are chronologically written and the order in which they are presented (which, they note, frequently diverge), and a chart tracking the quantity of letters written and received by each character, as well as invaluable notes throughout the manuscript.

One must also stop and appreciate the fine introduction Warner writes for the book, which is executed with an almost Montesquieuan subtlety. He guides readers towards the places where Montesquieu has cached his universal themes: through Usbek's exceptional misery, Montesquieu investigates the theme of human happiness (xvii), while the relationship between nature and convention is often explored through the letters on clothing and women (xxii). He also, in a series of exceptionally sharp analyses of the text, models how one should approach such an artfully crafted book. Especially noteworthy is his exquisitely subtle explanation of the incestuous fable "Story of Aphéridon and Astarté" (67), which is ultimately too nuanced to summarize in this review (xxxiii–xliv). In another brilliant piece of such analysis that particularly struck this reviewer, the translators note that during a sequence involving a slave who pleads for Usbek to allow him to escape castration, Montesquieu seems to reference Genesis through the names of the characters and through the setting (a garden). Montesquieu draws an intriguing parallel between expulsion from Eden and castration. Or, to be more accurate, Warner explains that Montesquieu actually "invert[s] the story of the Garden of Eden in *Genesis*, for there the human is fully articulated only when outside of Eden, and not within it" (xlviii).

It is the hope of this reviewer that this excellent translation will encourage readers to return to the *Persian Letters* with a new seriousness. *Persian Letters* is fertile ground for further scholarly research. There is particularly fruitful work to be done investigating the role of philosophy in the book. From the outset of *Persian Letters* philosophy plays a central role. Usbek introduces their travels in the first letter by explaining that they travel because of “a longing for knowledge” and that he and Rica have “renounced the pleasures of a tranquil life in order to search laboriously for wisdom” (1). It initially seems that the motive behind Rica and Usbek’s journey—and therefore the impetus behind the whole body of letters—is a philosophic quest. However, it quickly becomes clear that Usbek is not the enlightened man promised in the first letter. He ultimately looks like a parody of philosophy; spiritually crippled, he withdraws into theoretical concerns out of fatigue with life. As Warner puts it, the critical question becomes “why...Montesquieu craft[s] a character who is both philosophical and tyrannical” (xv). This question is the baffling core of the account of philosophy within *Persian Letters*. Bizarrely, it even seems that there is a *correlation* between how spiritually crippled Usbek is and how much his writings turn to questions of metaphysics and political philosophy: as he begins withdrawing more into solitude, he explicitly remarks to Rhédi that he has “become more of a metaphysician” than ever before (69). There is more scholarly work to be done to understand the meaning of this apparent connection between philosophy—or at least, certain things that appear to be philosophy—and the despotic personality.

However, one also finds individuals who exemplify the hunger for true knowledge and wisdom that Usbek initially claimed to have. Rhédi, a young Persian, voyages through Italy with “the sole end” of “educat[ing] himself” (25). “My mind,” Rica states, “is insensibly losing everything Asiatic that remains to it” (63). As the existence of these young cosmopolitans shows, not all those who seek knowledge are as conflicted as Usbek. Montesquieu confirms that there is something in the human heart that chafes against the confines of convention and is powerfully compelled toward a type of knowledge that has no national bounds.

In fact, the book addresses philosophic themes in an additional way: it seems designed to evoke, in the reader, the cosmopolitan urge that carried Rhédi and Rica so far from Persia. Beneath Montesquieu’s satirical take on French society is a universal enticement to readers to reach outside of convention in general. For instance, in letter 30, Rica describes how the French, upon learning that Rica is Persian, are inevitably struck with amazement: “if

by chance, someone in a group learned I was Persian, I heard at once a buzz all around me: ‘Ah! Ah! Monsieur is Persian? That is a very extraordinary thing! How can anyone be Persian?’” (30). The foil to the French mindset appears in the subsequent letter, where Rhédi explains that his time in Italy has allowed him to “com[e] out of the clouds that covered my eyes in the country of my birth” (31). Letters 30 and 31 present a pair of sharply diverging human possibilities: on one hand, there are the French, who have accepted, quite incorrectly, that their particular cultural horizon contains the sum of all human possibilities. On the other hand, there is Rhédi, who understands that he has been born with national prejudices and who strives to see beyond them. One shows the ridiculousness of accepting convention blindly, the other shows that one is not inevitably trapped within one’s conventional mindset: there is a way out of the cave. Together, these two letters comprise a call to action. The book gently invites all readers who live in the midst of societal conventions—which is to say, all readers—to examine our own provincial mindsets, to push aside the veil of convention which clouds our gaze.

In many ways, *Persian Letters* is a work that resists being summarized; ultimately, it must simply be read and enjoyed in all its richness. Warner and Douard’s excellent translation provides a new opportunity for English-language readers to experience Montesquieu’s literary masterpiece. It is to be hoped that other scholars will take up the baton offered up by Warner and Douard, and that such an outstanding translation will be matched by outstanding new interpretations of the work.

Jeffrey Tulis and Nicole Mellow, *Legacies of Losing in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018, 224 pp., \$27.50 (paper), \$85.00 (cloth).

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Nicole Mellow and Jeffrey Tulis present a challenging new thesis in *Legacies of Losing in American Politics*, arguing that political “winners” sometimes achieve hollow victories, while even the nation’s most memorable political “losers” may manage to facilitate later victories for their principles. By examining three critical periods in American history—the Ratification Debate, Andrew Johnson’s efforts to undermine Reconstruction, and Barry Goldwater’s 1964 challenge to the New Deal and its legacy—they show that the losers in each case lost while also setting the stage for their principles to mount a resurgence. Notably, Mellow and Tulis argue that these losses were actually instrumental in shaping the later successes; the later successes arose not despite the loss, but precisely because of it.

This argument is nowhere clearer than in their examination of the Ratification Debate. The authors argue that the Anti-Federalists and Federalists both recognized the Constitution for what it was: a proposal to create a strong—if not omnipotent—national government and launch a wholly new political order spread over an extended land mass and held together by commercial acquisitiveness (44). But while the Anti-Federalists voiced their fears openly, Publius was forced to employ mollifying language that played down the animating nationalist and liberal logic of the Constitution. As a result, we have too often remembered only Publius’s ostensible defenses of limited government and state power while missing his deeper argument: that the Constitution’s structure and logic would inevitably result in a powerful national government and completely undermine state power (48–49). The seemingly moderate case made by *The Federalist* defeated the

Anti-Federalists, but the losers recognized in their loss a strategy for future challenges to the new government. After ratification, the Anti-Federalists appropriated Publius's mollifying language as an accurate description of the aims of the Constitution, reclaiming "through interpretation what they had lost through constitutional construction and ratification" (31–32).

The analysis of the ratification debate sets the tone for the rest of the book, which argues that the principles of limited government and state power, despite repeated defeats, have continued to surge to prominence and offer serious challenges to the Constitution's animating logic. Thus, Tulis and Mellow see Andrew Johnson's and Barry Goldwater's challenges to their nationalist and liberal opponents as an outgrowth or unfolding of the original Federalist–Anti-Federalist debate. Johnson, Goldwater, and their followers, they argue, are heirs to the Anti-Federalists, seeking to reinterpret the modern, liberal, commercial Constitution and re-create some version of a republican, small-government regime more in line with the Articles of Confederation.

The chapter on Reconstruction presents an interesting case for the ultimate success of Andrew Johnson's policies. While Johnson had an opportunity to adopt a statesmanlike middle ground, moderating Radical Republicans without undermining Reconstruction, he chose instead to obstruct Republican efforts and offer the South a chance to reenter the Union on its own terms. Although the radicals hoped to use Reconstruction to impose a new ideological framework on the South, complete with redistribution of property and voting rights for black males, Johnson short-circuited the process, allowing southerners to reclaim their status as citizens in good standing at the cost only of a loyalty oath and offering thousands of presidential pardons. By allowing the southern states to reenter the Union and undermining more radical plans, he gave the South time to get back on its feet and paved the way for the introduction of Jim Crow laws. Moreover, even when Johnson was hamstrung by congressional Republicans, he successfully modeled for the South a strategy of obstruction and delay. Johnson's tactics were promptly adopted by southern Democrats and used to defend states' rights and prevent liberal reforms. Johnson's actions may have destroyed his own political career, but they also paved the way for the success of his policies for a hundred years.

Finally, Tulis and Mellow show how Barry Goldwater's 1964 electoral defeat opened the door to future challenges to the New Deal and its legacy by setting the stage for Ronald Reagan's election in 1980. Because Goldwater

valued integrity over electoral success, he proposed an outright rejection of the New Deal, refusing to soften or compromise his principles for the sake of election. While the moderate wing of the GOP, represented by Richard Nixon, Nelson Rockefeller, and a northeastern elite, accepted the basic principles of the New Deal and offered the nation “New Deal-extension” or “New Deal-light” (126), Goldwater articulated a real conservative-libertarian alternative focused on individual liberty and freedom from government (and especially national) control. Goldwater’s rhetoric and principles were too radical for the electorate in 1964, but he forced the GOP to the right, energized grassroots activists, and enunciated a vision capable of producing a new conservative coalition of southern and western states. By 1980, sixteen years too late for Goldwater’s electoral fortunes, these efforts had prepared the country to accept the conservative-libertarian principles he had championed and reached fruition with Reagan’s election.

Legacies of Losing addresses itself to an American political development audience, proposing an alternative to two major narratives in American politics. In contrast to scholars such as Bruce Ackerman, Theodore Lowi, and Walter Dean Burnham, who emphasize the Founding, the Civil War, and the New Deal as key transformative “constitutional moments” or “critical realignments,” our authors view these moments not as radical breaks from the past, but as a continuing unfolding of the nationalist and liberal logic of the Constitution. This logic, they contend, has consistently advanced even while being repeatedly challenged by the Anti-Federalists and their intellectual heirs, as represented by the states’ rights principles of Andrew Johnson and the small-government conservatism of Barry Goldwater. Similarly, they propose to complicate and make more complete Louis Hartz’s thesis, which paints a picture of an inherently liberal tradition in America. To this end, they argue that although the Constitution’s animating logic did win out in each of their three case studies, nevertheless these victories have been incomplete, for what they view as the Constitution’s fundamentally liberal trajectory has been persistently challenged by what they call an “ascriptive” republican tradition which defends “inequality and hierarchy” (7).

Vickie B. Sullivan, *Montesquieu and the Despotic Ideas of Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, xi + 288 pp., \$50 (cloth).

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The Spirit of the Laws is one of those books that seem to comprehend everything under the sun; as Montesquieu remarks in his preface, it includes an “infinite number of things.” But Montesquieu also says that a single argument runs through his text, connecting his many points and allowing readers to experience them as “truths.” “Many of the truths will make themselves felt here only when one sees the chain connecting them with others” (SOTL Pref.). In this thought-provoking book, Vickie B. Sullivan claims that she has found that central argument: if not the whole chain, then “the most important link of all,” is “despotism” (Sullivan 16).

Sullivan begins her case by contrasting it with two other interpretations, each having some basis in Montesquieu. Some scholars, with Durkheim at their head, see Montesquieu as a practitioner of empirical social science, in keeping with his announcement, “I do not write to censure that which is established in any country whatsoever. Each nation will find here the reasons for its maxims” (SOTL Pref.; Sullivan 219n1); others notice that Montesquieu does indeed criticize what is established in Turkey, Japan, China, Persia, and other faraway countries, but they attribute this to what Edward W. Said calls the “orientalist” assumption of European superiority (Sullivan 220n4). But as Sullivan shows (3–4, 7–11, 69–70), Montesquieu’s strongly negative account of despotism does not overlook the deeds of his fellow Europeans, whether he is decrying the deepening absolutism in the French monarchy (SOTL 5.10–11), Spanish genocide in America (4.6), or persecution of Jews under the Portuguese Inquisition (25.13).

Sullivan understands Montesquieu to be a proponent of moderate and free government, modeled not on the virtuous city of antiquity but on commercial England in modern times. This reading puts her in sympathetic dialogue with scholars like Aurelian Craiutu, Sharon Krause, Thomas L. Pangle, Paul A. Rahe, and Diana J. Schaub. What distinguishes her own interpretation is the claim that Montesquieu believes despotism still poses a threat in modern times, and may even prevail in Europe, because of the continuing influence of certain virulent ideas. When Montesquieu writes, “I would consider myself the happiest of mortals, if I could make it so that men were able to cure themselves of their prejudices” (SOTL Pref.), Sullivan reads it not as a melancholy wish or evasion of responsibility, but a plan of action.

Sullivan finds general confirmation of this agenda in a remarkable passage from book 12. While discussing “the laws that form political liberty in relation to the citizen,” Montesquieu writes, “The knowledge already acquired in some countries and yet to be acquired in others, concerning the surest rules one can observe in criminal judgments, is of more concern to mankind than anything else in the world” (SOTL 12.2; Sullivan 4–7, 60–63, 207–10, etc.). That Montesquieu should ascribe supreme importance to court proceedings must seem very strange at first, but his meaning becomes clearer when we realize that he is speaking of the separation of powers. Those who execute the laws should not act as judges: this is a rule that Montesquieu praises in England, but it has already been ignored in France by Louis XIII, whose successor would further blur the line between monarchy and despotism with his delusions of grandeur and contempt for constitutional limits (SOTL 6.5; cf. 8.6–7, 11.6). This gives some indication of why knowledge of rules concerning criminal judgments could be not only most important in politics, but—as Sullivan acutely notes—most important for human beings as such (5, 221n13). Montesquieu calls prejudices “not what makes one unaware of certain things but what makes one unaware of oneself,” and human beings are especially apt to forget themselves while judging one another.

It is not clear whether Sullivan has definitively proved her thesis that despotism is, in fact, the “chain” that unites the whole of Montesquieu’s great work. Such a proof may require a different sort of commentary from the one that Sullivan provides here; most obviously, it would require her to follow and account for the surface order (and disorder) of Montesquieu’s text. But Sullivan certainly demonstrates that whatever else Montesquieu may be doing in his book, he is indeed contending against certain “despotic ideas of Europe.” Her book is organized in three parts, each corresponding to a group of ideas that Montesquieu opposes in *Spirit of the Laws*. In the first place, there are

the ideas of modern political philosophers, specifically Machiavelli (chap. 1) and Hobbes (chap. 2). Next, there are Christian ideas, operative in Montesquieu's own day (chap. 3) but beginning their political influence already in late antiquity (chap. 4). And finally, there are the ideas of classical political philosophers, specifically Plato (chap. 5) and Aristotle (chap. 6).

Sullivan's excellent chapter on Machiavelli draws out the layers of agreement and disagreement in Montesquieu's remarks on "this great man" (SOTL 6.5), including the irony in that very compliment. Montesquieu refers to Machiavelli's political legacy as a disease: "One has begun to be cured of Machiavellianism," he writes, "and one will continue to be cured of it" (SOTL 21.20; Sullivan 27). Machiavelli is widely denounced for his outrageous praise of brutality, notably that of Cesare Borgia in *The Prince*. Nevertheless, as Sullivan shows (28–32), his teaching has persuaded monarchs and their courts that if a king is to be great he must act despotically, as Charles IX did when ordering the massacre of the Huguenots. Montesquieu, in contrast, admires the "great and generous courage" that noblemen of the time showed in refusing to dishonor themselves by obeying such an order (4.2). As for republics, Machiavelli praises the early Roman practice of allowing the people to join in accusing, judging, and punishing the crime of treason (*Discourses* 1.16); in his view, such a practice is needed if a people is to remain free. Montesquieu replies that such involvement actually destroys *civil* liberties by subjecting citizens to one another's arbitrary wills (6.5; Sullivan 32–41).

Although Hobbes makes only one explicit appearance in *Spirit of the Laws* (1.2), Montesquieu declares (in his *Defense*) that the book's author "always" "attacked the errors of Hobbes" (Sullivan 50). Like Machiavelli, Hobbes erases the distinction between moderate and despotic government; he understands sovereignty to be maintained on the basis of fear—which Montesquieu identifies as the principle of despotism—and he buries natural humanity under the artificial guise of a "mortal god." Thus Hobbes sought to eliminate the general disorder by overturning the tranquility of individual citizens (62–4). Montesquieu does not describe Hobbesianism as a disease, however, but only as so many errors, and this difference is reflected in Sullivan's careful discussion. What Montesquieu says generally in his preface applies to Hobbes's case in particular: "One feels the old abuses and sees their correction, but one also sees the abuses of the correction itself" (SOTL Pref.; Sullivan 64). Indeed, Sullivan had applied the same dictum in the previous chapter (48), which suggests that, for Montesquieu, *both* moderns were basically correct regarding "the abuses."

Montesquieu's predecessors see European peoples divided and governments subverted by an independent authority in their midst. That authority—in a word—is Christianity. As for Montesquieu, Sullivan is at pains to note that he does have appreciative things to say about the role of Christianity in eradicating slavery in Europe and allowing women to join in many areas of society (85–91). But as she shows in her comments on 24.13, Montesquieu sees abuses as well. Although Christians believe in the possibility of mercy and redemption for all, they can never be certain *who* will be judged and consigned to eternal torment (Sullivan 95–99). As a result, despotically minded people have an especially powerful way of playing on people's fears; making use of the "idea that the divinity must be avenged" (SOTL 12.4; Sullivan 101–2), they have mobilized the most horrifying persecutions of witches, heretics, and unbelievers.

When Sullivan turns from modern to ancient times, she brings to sight still more causes for concern. Christians have long been taught to live in prayerful "contemplation" and practice the virtue of chastity. That could seem wholesome enough, but Sullivan finds that Montesquieu objects on multiple levels. Such a "pursuit of perfection" not only suppresses birth rates—a curious preoccupation of Montesquieu's—it also leads to intrusions born of moral fanaticism, as when Christian emperors decreed that widows remain celibate rather than remarry (124–34). But perhaps the greatest problem that stems from late antiquity is that *treason* came to be conflated with *sacrilege*. In this regard at least, the problem would appear to lie not with Christianity itself, but the politicization of Christianity under Constantine.

As Sullivan shows (139–41), Montesquieu never discusses Plato's activity as a philosopher, only his actions as a "political man of Greece." Amending the laws of Lycurgus before him, Plato advocated "singular institutions" that made every possible effort "to inspire virtue" (4.6; Sullivan 141–53). The proposals of his *Republic* and *Laws* were "beautiful ideas," works of genius, but also deeply disturbing, for he advocated eugenics, upheld the notorious Spartan training in theft, gave arbitrary power to certain magistrates, and—worst of all—enslaved one class in order to grant leisure to another (Sullivan 159–62). The very formulation "beautiful ideas" turns out to be ironic, used by Montesquieu in reference to a law punishing those who commit suicide out of weakness—a law unduly harsh and requiring judges to know more than humanly possible (29.9; Sullivan 163–65). Sullivan makes a convincing case that Montesquieu is opposing Plato's influence: despotic institutions, defended in the name of virtue.

Her chapter on “Aristotle’s manner of thinking” (the title of SOTL 11.9) begins an intriguing finale to her book. Montesquieu presents Aristotle as the student who, envious of his teacher’s brilliance, “seems to have written his *Politics* only in order to oppose his feelings to Plato’s” (SOTL 29.19, 4.8; Sullivan 171–72). But even as Aristotle bridles at Plato’s most radical teachings, he still promulgates a version of his beautiful ideas. Aristotle distinguishes between kingship and tyranny “by accidental things, like the virtues or the vices of the prince” rather than by the arrangement of powers of government (SOTL 11.9). As Sullivan notes, this puts Aristotle in company with Richelieu in Montesquieu’s account (190–91). Again, Aristotle defended (some) slavery as natural, without dispelling the Greek prejudice that slavery is what barbarians are fit for. Such teachings, already problematic, would prove disastrous when Aristotle’s books returned to the West and combined with Christian thought. In particular, his opposition to usury would lend spurious justification to the persecution of Jews and slow the growth of commerce in Christian Europe (195–204).

Not a few have noticed that Aristotle and Montesquieu are much alike, but Sullivan presents Montesquieu as a sort of counter-Aristotle who succeeded where Aristotle failed. According to her conclusion, that alternative is prefigured by Alexander (210–13).¹ Montesquieu holds up Alexander as a man open to the habits and customs of barbarian peoples, who was free of the Greek prejudice that barbarians are born for slavery, who sought to unite peoples through maritime commerce, and who, of course, was not Christian. On the latter point, Sullivan suggests that Montesquieu encouraged a progressive version of Christianity that kept its advances while softening its fanaticism (214–15). But she also stresses one last parallel with Alexander: Montesquieu’s humane project is not only an act of genius, but an act of conquest (217). Sullivan thus leaves us wondering about Montesquieu’s own motives as a legislator, and whether, on close examination, he would not confess that his campaign against despotism is itself despotic.

In this instance, and indeed on every page in her book, Sullivan succeeds in drawing her readers into thoughtful inquiry about Montesquieu’s elusive text, and also—though she is basically silent about it—about the crisis of liberal constitutionalism in our time.

¹ Sullivan is not the first to stress the significance of Alexander in Montesquieu’s work; she cites the work of Catherine Volpilhac-Auger and Catherine Larrère (Sullivan 265n7). Andrea Radasanu anticipates more of Sullivan’s insights in “Montesquieu on Ancient Greek Foreign Relations: Toward National Self-Interest and International Peace,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (March 2013): 3–17.

Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 2017, 557 pp., \$30.00 (hardcover).

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“What kind of thing is the law of nations?” Yale Law School professors Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro provide a riveting answer to this question in a history of international law spanning four hundred years. The question was posed in 1857 by a Japanese dignitary trying to make sense of American gunboat diplomacy, specifically, of the terms by which Japan would henceforth be open to trade with the United States and other Western powers. The answer provided by the American consul at the time was a classic assertion of imperial power, supported by the force of Commodore Perry’s fleet. Among other concessions, Japan would open three ports to the United States where Americans could live under US law, subject only to American courts. Similar conditions had been imposed on China a decade earlier, as it was forced to legalize the import of opium and cede Hong Kong to the British in perpetuity. From Mexico to Macau and from Barbados to Bengal, this was the law of nations: states (often supporting trading companies) could legally coerce other states into signing treaties, ceding commercial and territorial rights.

What could be seen as war capitalism informed by old political realism is, according to Hathaway and Shapiro, rather something new. Western powers began to dominate the world on the basis of an emerging international law. The drive to conquest may have roots in human nature (in such motives as interests, fear, and honor) but its justification, and taming, is a matter of art, which (in the authors’ view) may transform human nature (115). It took the legal genius of Hugo Grotius to devise a system of laws that both controlled war (by exhaustively stating the grounds for just war) while also justifying

colonial expansion on the grounds of natural law—notably, on the principle of “sociability” (cf. 136). Indeed, it was that principle that compelled Japan to trade with the world, for, as the American consul Townsend Harris put it: “No nation has the right to refuse to hold intercourse with others” (136). Japan learned the lesson all too well. Having sent some of its brightest youth (and later foreign policy advisers) to study in Holland under a leading Grotius expert, Japan would force Korea, in 1876, to enter into trade relations—the first step of its brutal conquest of East Asia (143, 149).

The central thesis of *The Internationalists* is that all of this changed in 1928 with the signing of the General Treaty for Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy, better known as the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Whereas in the “Old World Order,” as codified in the work of Grotius, “Might made Right,” this ceased to be the case in the “New World Order” born with the pact (319, 333). The old Roman maxim “If you want peace, prepare for war” gave way to its opposite: “If you want peace, prepare for peace” (xi). Though the birth of the New World of “global cooperation” built on “hundreds of thousands of international agreements” has been painfully slow and complex, its key principle is simple: aggressive war is no longer legal (305, 332, xvii–xviii). Deprived of its foundation in war, the edifice of the Old World Order has crumbled. States can no longer (legally) conquer other states; gunboat diplomacy has lost its legitimacy; and the main method of enforcement has become economic sanctions (xii, 304–5).

The Internationalists is divided in three parts, with the genesis of the pact (1919–1946) in the center, flanked by the “Old World Order” (ca. 1603–1899) and the “New World Order” (ca. 1946–2016). The central (and longest) part, titled “Transformations,” essentially rewrites the history of the twentieth-century quest to govern the world. Through meticulous archival research, the authors seek to establish that the backbone of the current international order, the United Nations, is an American creation. By this, they mean that the UN Charter was “conceived by Americans, negotiated by Americans, and made possible by Americans” (213). Not only was the first draft penned by James T. Shotwell (196), a professor of history at Columbia University; more importantly, its core premise—the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy—was also conceived by the Americans who fought for the 1928 pact. This principle was then incorporated into the constitutions of Germany, Italy, and Japan (214). In short, no Kellogg-Briand Pact, no United Nations or lasting peace. The Paris Peace Pact, as the subtitle has it, “remade the world.”

On the surface, this is a narrative of the triumph of law over power politics. But this is not what the book seeks to show. What remade the world, according to the authors, were ideas, which created laws as well as power. Indeed, the central theoretical thesis of the book is that “*real power . . . does not exist in the absence of law. Law creates real power*” (422). This means that it is not—or not *only*—thanks to NATO, or to American hegemony, or to nuclear weapons that there has been no great-power conflict since 1945. We owe the long peace (at least in part) to a normative transformation that has, in effect, transformed human nature (332, cf. 115). Just as slavery, long considered “natural,” was outlawed, so we have outlawed war. What was previously justified as part of war (arson, rape, plunder, torture), and seen as “natural,” is now a crime (115). Only this seems to account for the remarkable fact that no state has ever used the threat of nuclear war to expand its territory (332).

The authors focus on two mechanisms that have led to a “far more peaceful” world (13). The first is sheer human ingenuity, buttressed by pragmatic and “idealistic” thinking (cf. 115, 213–14). The key organizing principle of the New World Order, according to Hathaway and Shapiro, is the World Trade Organization (preceded by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade signed in 1947) (378–79). Free trade has completely transformed our lived reality: the food we eat, the technology we use, the medicines we can buy (378). Yet, more importantly in geopolitical terms, the WTO has made possible a global order that does not depend on the threat of force. The power of the WTO rests on an institution developed a millennium ago in Iceland, namely, “outcasting” (373). Just as Iceland lived peacefully for centuries without an executive power (or an army, or a police force), relying on assemblies where delinquents could be ostracized (and eventually killed with impunity), so the WTO may exclude even the strongest powers from the gains of trade (372).

This has not prevented the current trade war between China and the United States; nor was the threat of sanctions sufficient to dissuade Putin from seizing Crimea in 2014. But these are exceptions. Indeed, Putin’s invasion was the first territorial conquest in decades (in the Old World Order, this was the norm: “roughly *eleven* Crimeas per year” [314]). What is more, almost every conquest that took place after 1928 has been reversed. Thus, for example, Japan gave up Manchuria and parts of China; Italy returned Ethiopia; and the Soviet Union lost the Baltic countries. As the authors’ quantitative analyses show, the amount of land seized in the 1930s that was later returned is striking indeed (317). And the principle is clear: states simply stopped recognizing illegal conquests soon after the Paris Peace Pact of 1928.

Once Might no longer made Right, states became free to focus on absolute (versus relative) gains: comparative advantage became the name of the game as international trade soared (343).

Institutional design—made possible by the legal revolution of 1928—was one mechanism that promoted peace. The other mechanism, which preceded it, was a battle of ideas. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the book narrates the struggle between towering jurists pleading the case for and against the New World Order. The leading minds were (respectively) Hersch Lauterpacht and Carl Schmitt, whose legal acumen clashed in the Nuremberg trials. As an adviser to US attorney general Robert Jackson, Lauterpacht provided the reasoning that authorized the Lend-Lease act of 1941, and thus the US retreat from neutrality, on the basis of the 1928 Peace Pact (247). Lauterpacht also advised Jackson in his role as chief prosecutor for the United States at Nuremberg. Lauterpacht argued that the 1928 pact had made the outbreak of war a concern of the entire world (239). If aggressive war is illegal, signatories to the pact could not remain neutral. Not only could they (legally) discriminate and impose sanctions on aggressors, but they could also (criminally) prosecute them, as the Nuremberg trials did (239, 249, 267, 270).

Lauterpacht's opponent in Nuremberg was Schmitt, who, in the summer of 1945, wrote a long memo to defend the German industrialist and war supporter Friedrich Flick (271). Though Flick was not prosecuted, Schmitt's memo was followed almost verbatim by Hermann Jahrreiss in his plea for the defense (286). Schmitt was emphatic that the "unspeakable crimes" of Hitler and his accomplices must be punished, without the need to invoke a positivistic norm. But war itself could not be criminalized (274). Since there is no definition of war, its criminalization would be an infinite project—namely, perpetual vigilance of the "enemies of all humanity" on a planetary scale; hence perpetual war.¹

Though Schmitt's argument may have been prophetic of the post-9/11 escalation of violent conflict on a global scale—conflict fueled by infinite counterterrorism operations and ill-designed "wars" on drugs, for example—it was defeated on the plane of international law, which now considers aggressive war a crime. Schmitt was arrested in September 1945 by the Office of the Military Government of the United States (275). In captivity, he penned a remarkable eulogy of the Old World Order and its architects. Of Vitoria,

¹ See Carl Schmitt, "The International Crime of the War of Aggression and the Principle '*Nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege*'" (1945), in *Writings on War*, ed. and trans. Timothy Nunan (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 156, cf. 154, 166.

Gentili, and Grotius, he wrote, “I love them. They belong to our camp.” Referring to Bodin and Hobbes, he went further: “These two figures from the religious civil wars became living, contemporary people to me. They are brothers to me and we became, transcending centuries, a family” (294, citing Schmitt’s unpublished manuscript “*Ius Publicum Europaeum*”).

It is a great irony of *The Internationalists* that it adopts Schmitt’s framework and premises to proclaim the defeat of Schmitt and his camp. In the book’s narrative, the thinkers of the *ius publicum europaeum* (Schmitt’s “family”) are “interventionists,” against whom a long line of thinkers and lawyers and professors—from Kant, Rousseau, and Lauterpacht to Samuel Levinson and James T. Shotwell—provide an “internationalist” alternative (96–97, 423). Yet, of course, the leading interventionist power has been the United States, whose role in “policing the system” through the kind of war that has been outlawed barely elicits a line of criticism from Hathaway and Shapiro (cf. 419). “Law creates *real* power,” according to the authors, but one must also say that sovereign power can suspend the law, as the proliferation of states of exception after 9/11 has shown. *The Internationalists* should be read as a powerful case for the view that laws, and ideas, have the power to shape the behavior of citizens and statesmen. The narrative around that case is, at best, a brilliant polemic, which seeks to defeat Schmitt at his own game.

David Lowenthal, *Shakespeare's Thought: Unobserved Details and Unsuspected Depths in Thirteen Plays*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017, 332 pp., \$110.00 (hardcover).

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In 1994, David Lowenthal, then professor of political philosophy at Boston College, published *Shakespeare and the Good Life: Ethics and Politics in Dramatic Form*, a study of seven plays by William Shakespeare (*Tempest*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*). More than just a commentary on these dramas, this book sought to explore the philosopher-poet's thoughts "on moral, political, religious, philosophical matters, on the things that mean the most to men, on [the] art itself that animates the plays" (ix). By doing so, Lowenthal endeavored to recover the human and political wisdom of Shakespeare against contemporary academic trends that would historicize his work, bury his insights into nature and the human condition under an avalanche of prejudices about race, class, and gender, and turn that "mirror of nature" found in his dramatic poetry by centuries of his best readers into a reflection of the modern scholarly preoccupation with cultural materialism.

At the time of this earlier publication, I happened to be an undergraduate student of Professor Lowenthal, and thus a novice reader of Shakespeare largely uninitiated in the broader trends characterizing the massive secondary literature on the Bard. But over the next twenty years, as my experience with Shakespeare and Shakespearean scholarship deepened as a reader, a student, and ultimately a professor of political science, I came to appreciate the genuine contribution that *Shakespeare and the Good Life* made to an understanding Shakespeare's philosophic depths. Fortunately, the recent republication of this work, now titled *Shakespeare's Thought: Unobserved*

Details and Unsuspected Depths in Thirteen Plays, makes available to a new generation of students the virtues of Lowenthal's earlier and, to my mind, insufficiently appreciated book. And with additional chapters on *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, it offers further evidence that David Lowenthal, now professor emeritus, is among the best readers of Shakespeare to emerge in the last hundred years.

Lowenthal's approach to reading Shakespeare might best be described as a naive openness to both the coherence of Shakespeare's dramatic work, the belief that "absolutely nothing in a Shakespearean play is there by accident" (ix), and the possibility that Shakespeare has something fundamentally important to teach us about human life. For Lowenthal, the method and the message of Shakespeare's dramas are united by the effort to deepen and refine our understanding of the challenges facing all reasoned efforts to live the good life. Such an approach issues in a reading of the plays that supports the argument, originally advanced by Allan Bloom and Harry Jaffa nearly sixty years ago (and thus long before Stephen Greenblatt "discovered" politics in Shakespeare), that Shakespeare was a political thinker of the first rank. It also presents a powerful rebuttal to the view of one of Shakespeare's greatest critics, A. C. Nuttall, that "denied Shakespeare was essentially a man of reason rather than imagination" (ix), a view which has been taken as an unquestionable and unquestioned verity by generations of scholars working on Shakespeare. Lowenthal thus argues for an approach to the wisdom of Shakespeare's plays that is at once new and old, immediate and venerable. It is immediate because it is available to human beings wherever and whenever they might be found. And it is venerable insofar as it is the approach largely adopted by Shakespeare's readers for most of the four hundred years following his death.

It is to a recovery of this older approach to reading Shakespeare that Lowenthal dedicates his original preface and his opening chapter. Drawing extensively upon the artistic judgment of Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Thomas De Quincey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, among others, Lowenthal shows that Shakespeare's earliest and most sensitive readers understood him to hold "up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life" (9), and thus "to be not only a poet of the greatest genius but a teacher, a philosopher, a wise man" (287). Lowenthal thus illustrates the cost to reading Shakespeare that comes from the more recent scholarly efforts to divorce "the artist from the goal of understanding the nature of things" (13). "The work of the poet," he writes, "is now set adrift

on a subjective sea, with nothing that it must try to mirror or understand 'out there,' and hence no means of judging its adequacy qua truth.... Our critics bring to the study of Shakespeare assumptions that are not his" (13).

To be fair to the cultural materialists among Shakespeare scholars, Lowenthal does not address contemporary academic trends in detail. In fact, he hardly addresses any texts on Shakespeare, contemporary or otherwise. Instead, he takes his cue from "two classics of Shakespearean interpretation—A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* and Harold C. Goddard's *The Meaning of Shakespeare*—both of which are also quite niggardly in citing others" (xvii). While Lowenthal's reading of the plays would benefit from an engagement with select works on Shakespeare (more on this below), the oblique treatment of academic trends that he offers here does not lessen the power of his criticism. The classic judgments on Shakespeare amassed in the work's opening pages constitute a formidable backdrop against which the historicist rendering of Shakespeare so prevalent today will be found shallow, rigidly ideological, and, perhaps most unforgivably, boring.

Of course, the proof of the pudding always lies in its eating. If Shakespeare's plays do indeed hold up a mirror to nature, as Lowenthal so confidently contends, then he has to show how and that they do. As the new title of his work suggests, his commentary on thirteen plays, most of which originally appeared in print as journal articles and chapters in edited volumes, is not tightly organized around a single theme; there is no simple thesis or argument that he tries to prove. This might explain why his book does not conclude so much as just end. And his inclusion of six new chapters is guided as much by considerations of genre (the original work did not cover any of the histories or comedies) as anything else. So while the chapters on the plays are placed "in an order best calculated to convey the content and manner of [Shakespeare's] philosophy," each "is treated as a universe of its own" (xvi) and can thus be read independently of the rest of the book.

What then ties together these thirteen chapters? By trying to convey the playwright's "philosophy," Lowenthal does not attribute to Shakespeare a doctrinal or systematic view of man meant to be parroted by his audience. On the contrary, Lowenthal, anticipating the approach taken by David Bevington in *Shakespeare's Ideas* (2008), cautions that there is "no easy or direct way to learn Shakespeare's own views, and thus his overall philosophy, if he had one" (4). The "plays are not written in such a way as to suggest plainly that they constitute intellectual inquiries or demonstrations" (4). To the extent that Shakespeare teaches his audience, he does so to make them reflect on

the political significance of the claim to rule by the wise, to think about the natural or conventional basis of justice, to explore contending views of the best regime, to consider the biblical alternative to classical philosophy, and, in light of all of this, to order their passions, especially love and anger, accordingly. But if this is true, then what Lowenthal states about “the political art” in his treatment of *The Tempest*—that it is “the art of getting men to do what reason dictates, whether by nourishing reason within them...or by providing their souls with motives and habits other than reason that bring out the outcome that reason requires” (44)—suggests that Shakespeare exercises the political art at the highest level available to man. The fundamental aim of *Shakespeare’s Thought* is to show how the philosopher-poet displays in the selected plays the “classical inspiration and esoteric presentation” (xvi) of what one is tempted to call his “political science.”

On the character of that political science, Lowenthal declares that Shakespeare is “an independently thinking follower of classical philosophy—of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—whose understanding of their teaching and that of their pre-Socratic predecessors was profound” (xvi). This does not lead him to engage in laborious speculation about which classical Greek and Roman texts (and their translations) Shakespeare had available to him, which ones he might have read, and what he might have understood from them; for that difficult task one must look elsewhere (see for instance Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, 2013). For better or worse, the positions of the ancient Greek philosophers that Lowenthal posits here are not argued for so much as simply asserted and treated as if the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were simply univocal. But for Lowenthal, who was surely aware of these difficulties, such concerns are beside the point. For the purposes of his book, it is sufficient to understand classical philosophy to offer an alternative to a world whose views on God, the nature of the universe, moral and intellectual virtue, and political life have been decisively shaped by Christianity, a world whose foundations were beginning to feel the effects of both the Protestant Reformation and the early stirrings of the Enlightenment. To what extent then can Shakespeare’s plays be understood to reflect and point to a classical alternative to Christian and early modern thought?

Of all the plays, *The Tempest* presents Shakespeare’s most direct or overt engagement with *the* classic text of Greek political philosophy, Plato’s *Republic*, and the claim for which that work is most famous, namely, that there will be no end to injustices in political life until philosophers become kings or kings are made to philosophize. In the figure of Prospero, one finds a ruler

in total control of both the material and human subjects of his island “kingdom,” a man whose claim to rule is based on his superior intellectual and, ultimately, moral virtue. It is thus from neither divine right nor customary practice (i.e., hereditary succession or popular consent) but from his naturally superior ability to educate, and thus serve the genuine benefit of those he commands, that Prospero’s just authority derives.

But, as Lowenthal points out, the wisdom that grounds Prospero’s rule is not fully mature at the beginning of the play; *The Tempest* reveals the basis of Prospero’s own education as much as it shows his ability to educate and moderate the passions of Miranda, Ferdinand, Caliban, and his erstwhile enemy Alonso. According to Lowenthal, a careful viewing of the play shows us Prospero *becoming* wise, a wisdom that is humane because it is rooted in, among other things, an awareness of both his passionate attachment to other human beings and the necessity of an engagement in politics. Such an education necessarily entails an awareness of the limits of his political art (humans being mortal after all) and the influence and role that the rule of the wise can have on human and political life, as the recalcitrant Antonio and Sebastian indicate. The superior humanity that Prospero achieves by the end of the play therefore stands in stark contrast to the technocratic mastery that has allowed him to rule his island despotically for twelve years. A wise man whose continued intellectual and political pursuits are now moderated by these insights, the restored duke of Milan will be neither Christian saint nor Baconian scientist.

In the subsequent chapters, Lowenthal explores the need for and challenges to the life dedicated to wisdom with its superior claim to political rule. Thus, the next chapter, on the issue of succession in *King Lear*, takes up the question of the origins of natural right. Lear’s complex and subtle scheme to place royal succession in England on a new footing raises the question “whether human justice and political life have a foundation in nature or are merely conventional” (65), a question with implications for “the relationship of gods to nature” (66) and thus for what “the fundamental causes of things really” are (72). Despite *Lear*’s tragic ending, Lowenthal concludes that “far from demonstrating the meaninglessness of the universe, and its resistance to justice, the play shows why justice must have a lasting and secure place in the minds and hearts of men. Founded in the social nature of man, justice is conventional only in its forms, while its substance remains fixed and universal” (80). The basis of natural right then is located in an enduring human nature. And its chief expression is not to be found in the changing laws and

ordinances of a political community, but in the art of Shakespeare that renders the world intelligible and proves that life is not a “tale told by an idiot signifying nothing.”

It is in *Julius Caesar*, however, according to Lowenthal, that Shakespeare most directly explores the challenge posed to philosophy by the life of political practice at its highest level. He argues that Shakespeare’s Caesar secures for himself a kind of apotheosis by deliberately engineering his own martyrdom, a glory achieved by no other historical figure. But it is Shakespeare, through his art, and Shakespeare’s Cicero, through his political philosophy, who achieve more fully the rest and order that characterize the different ends sought by both theory and practice. While Caesar’s glory depends on the changing judgments of men, the knowledge that Shakespeare and his Cicero “pursue links the mind to the eternal, lifting it above the flux of things, uniting it with other minds, and proving (as Plato showed) that in the universe the last word belongs to peace and order rather than to war and disorder” (118). Shakespeare’s view of honor, however, is not simply negative. The criticism of political ambition and the pursuit of public honor that is implicit in his *Caesar* and which gets developed more fully in the chapters on *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Coriolanus* helps channel man’s spirited nature towards the conditions necessary for a healthy and free politics.

The redirection of *thumos* to a more natural fulfillment in republican politics finds its counterpart in Shakespeare’s treatment of *eros* in the dramas dedicated to sex and love. Whether in the “pagan” forests of Athens and Arden or the Christianized cities of Verona, Venice, and Vienna, Shakespeare navigates the lovers in his audience between the extremes towards which they are driven by the body’s sexual urges and the soul’s longing for an idealized transcendence. Lowenthal argues that for Shakespeare, “the only prospect for overcoming these divisions and differences lies in [a] rational cosmology,” such as is supplied by Portia of Belmont at the end of *Merchant of Venice*, one which accepts “all lovers, whatever their origin, in their natural admixture of body and soul” (141). As with his treatment of justice, Shakespeare, according to Lowenthal, offers a qualified and nonsacramental defense of the custom of marriage.

Shakespeare’s Thought plumbs the unsuspected depths of Shakespeare’s “political art” and finds its ground in philosophic reflection on the human condition, an activity rooted in man’s “abstract urge to know” (2). To be sure, Shakespeare’s dramas do not explicitly reveal these grounds (287). Lowenthal must make great efforts to explicate the hidden political and pedagogical

rationale for such an indirect presentation, efforts that constitute one of the work's many highlights. But he can reach such depths because he tends with an unrivaled care to the details of Shakespeare's dramas, "which are usually passed by as merely incidental, but which are in fact subtle contributions to the theme under development" (xv). Whether observing Duncan's plan for Scottish succession (154ff.) or Ross's consummate opportunism (168–71) in *Macbeth*, Cleopatra's letter-writing "campaign" (chap. 14) or Caesar's "suicide by conspiracy" (chap. 4), Prospero's papal-political project (26–27) or the movement of midsummer marriages (222), to name just a few examples, Lowenthal's intrepid reading prepares new vistas for those interested in exploring the coherence of Shakespeare's dramas.

Of course, any reading of Shakespeare that offers a unifying theory for the details of his dramas will open itself to charges of overreading. Lowenthal could parry this charge more easily had he shown how his readings build and improve upon the scholars who have come before and after his earlier work. Nevertheless, his interpretations tend to unfold in such an honest and dialectical manner as to defuse such criticism. Where Lowenthal runs into the most difficulty is in his treatment of the biblical alternative to the classical position that he attributes to the Bard. While he is no doubt correct to argue that Shakespeare's plays are often centrally concerned with the impact on politics and man's civic character of both Christian moral teaching and the Catholic Church, he overstates Shakespeare's critical view here. And he overstates his case because he misrepresents Christianity, effectively reducing its moral and political teaching to the Sermon on the Mount, a point that our author makes at least four times (227, 242, 244, and 265).

In Lowenthal's hands, Christianity's injunction to turn the other cheek becomes absolute pacifism (227, 252, and chap. 10) and the call to serve others before oneself turns into a radical, and contradictory, self-abnegation (131, 139, 203). "Christian politics" is therefore an oxymoron (166, 242, 243, 244, 252, and 263). To effect such a caricature, Lowenthal knowingly sets aside the writings of the early church fathers, St. Augustine chief among them, in favor of a hyperliteral reading of the Gospels (265). But as a human text believed to be inspired by God, one cannot treat the Christian scriptures as a Muslim must treat the Koran. The Gospels require interpretation and thus the deliberation that Lowenthal would deny to it (263). Instead of a list of absolute commandments, Christian teaching offers a moral vocabulary or grammar whose application demands the very prudence that Lowenthal attributes to *Shakespeare's* political science. To appreciate this aspect of Christianity is not

to say that Shakespeare was a believer or that his plays sought to endorse Christian belief. It is rather to call into question the sharp divide between Shakespeare's presumably classical view of the world and the Christianity that Lowenthal argues so stridently against. After all, are not the bellicosity and lust that Christianity tries to suppress (266) the same passions that classical philosophy tried to tame? And when Lowenthal decries the gap between Christian ideals and the harsh realities of our fallen condition, does he not thereby imprecate the gap between truth and life that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle knew would always frustrate the wise governance of human affairs? One might well wonder how such observations can constitute a refutation of Christianity when they simply confirm what all practicing Christians already know to be true about the world.

Such a reductionist view does not necessarily result in Lowenthal mishandling Shakespeare's texts. When he treats the problems posed by Antonio's extreme selflessness (139), the paralysis caused by Hamlet's Christian conscience (264), the dangers of Macduff's pious hopefulness (161, 163), or Friar Lawrence's tragic meddling (228), Lowenthal is not imposing on the texts burdens they cannot bear. But the entirely critical *judgment* of Christianity that Lowenthal attributes to Shakespeare prevents the reader from appreciating, for example, Henry V's respect for the limits embodied in a Christian order or the civilizing effects that Christianity might have on the England of *Cymbeline* and *King John*. Indeed, while Shakespeare's history plays illustrate the political consequences of a corrupt and meddling clergy, they also show the disasters that befall a community utterly bereft of Christian virtue. One could even argue that Shakespeare's Roman plays show us not only the virtues of classical politics, but how the exhaustion of those virtues eventuates in the demand for an articulation of the soul and its longings to which Christianity aspires to do justice.

This view, that Shakespeare appreciated the benefits and not just the deleterious political consequences of Christianity, at any rate seems less dogmatic and more consistent with the traditional notion that his dramas mirror nature in all of its marvelous complexity. It even seems more consistent with that view of the world so beautifully stated by Lowenthal at the end of his chapter on *Macbeth*. Despite that play's grim overtones, the world, for Shakespeare,

is not the dark place it seems, and certainly not unintelligible. It is intelligible because the natures of the things in it are, and must be, intelligible. With its amazing array of beings, culminating in man, it is

even the kind of world reason would choose, given what is possible. It contains ugliness because it also contains beauty, baseness because it also contains nobility, evil because it also contains good.... He seems to have concluded, as a general matter, that good is more fundamental than evil in the world, whatever the practical difficulties in the way of realizing it, and however great the predominance of evil. (193)

If this is correct, then the necessity of the interplay between good and evil in human affairs should offer a sobering insight into our condition. But such sobriety might also explain why *Shakespeare's Thought* can inspire the joy and wonder that comes with learning how to live well from Shakespeare, a learning for which his best students, among whom we must count David Lowenthal, prepare us.

Mary Townsend, *The Woman Question in Plato's "Republic."* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017, 248 pp., \$95 (cloth).

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“For a city that is going to be governed on a high level, women must be in common, children and their entire education must be in common, and similarly the practices in war and peace must be in common, and their kings must be those among them who have proved best in philosophy and with respect to war” (543a). Socrates proclaims this to Glaucon at the beginning of Book VIII of the *Republic*, referring to topics discussed in the section commonly referred to as the “three Waves.” Though Socrates predicts waves of laughter at these startling suggestions, the consequences of these positions and their place in the dialogue are central to the discussion in *The Woman Question in Plato's "Republic"* by Mary Townsend.

The action of the dialogue begins when Socrates turns to greet others as he returns from the Piraeus where he said a prayer to the goddess and witnessed the celebration of the Thracian goddess Bendis. The provocative assertion about women and children quoted above comes in response to questions posed by those who entreat Socrates to stay for a further honoring of the goddess. Their conversation turns to justice. They seek a definition and judgment of the merits by examining justice in both the individual and the city and exploring many other wide-ranging topics such as education, virtue, the soul, and philosophy.

Townsend's book, as the title indicates, addresses in particular those parts that speak to the woman question in one of Plato's lengthiest dialogues. The book is composed of an introduction, nine chapters, and an epilogue. The author launches her inquiry with the initial task “to uncover and take

seriously the action of the First Wave (the radical change in the roles of women, children, and men)” (1) by explaining the content of the dialogue before and after the three Waves in Book V. The subsequent six chapters further explore the three Waves by focusing on specific topics including Glaucon’s *aporia*, *thumos* and *eros* in the hunt (one of the activities of the guardians), taming the hunting women, women and men exercising together, the political problem resulting from women in a private setting, and robes of virtue that clothe the women exercising naked. She devotes the last two chapters to the larger theme in Plato’s writing, the philosopher-king, and her critical assessment of the *Republic* in a chapter entitled “Woman Is a Political Animal.”

Townsend presents a stimulating reading of the *Republic*, with references to other Platonic dialogues that offer insight into the woman question as well as a wide array of secondary literature and authors in literature and philosophy. A prime example of Townsend’s careful reading is her reinterpretation of the three Waves, which is also a crucial part of her argument.

Socrates refers to “waves” in Book V when Polemarchus asks him to explain more fully the participation of women and children in the second city in speech, the city with a fever. Socrates expresses concern about waves of paradox or laughter when discussing these proposals. The content of the three Waves consists of the following: 1) the claim that some women are fit by nature to share in the same education and duties as male guardians, including stripping naked for exercise, though Socrates explains they will be clothed in virtue; 2) the claim, similar to the requirement that male guardians have no private property, use common messes, and live as soldiers, that women and children will also live in common, neither child nor parent will know one another, and women will join men in war; and 3) the claim that unless philosophers rule as kings or rulers study philosophy, that is, unless political power and philosophy come together, there will be no respite from evil. Most group the First and Second Waves together owing to their similar content, but Townsend proposes that the First and Third should be grouped together and that the Second is the outlier.

Townsend argues that bringing women into the public and political realm as Socrates does in the First Wave is similar to the role that he calls on philosophers to perform in the Third Wave. She identifies parallels between the women and philosophers: each may be dishonored by the city, each may be compelled to change their customary state, and each may be met with laughter (14). Further evidence of the link between the First and Third Waves is apparent in Socrates’s discussion of philosophy in Books II–IV, and the

second, more comprehensive discussion in Books V–VII. The entrée to this more extensive discussion, Townsend explains, is provided by the content of the First Wave, in part owing to the similarity of the problematic nature of women or philosophers ruling, the attractiveness of the proposition, and whether either desires to rule or remain outside of the public realm (14, 17, 18). To make the case that this is what Socrates is pursuing, she tailors her subsequent chapters to advance the argument, with special attention to the arguments that underscore the link between philosophy and women.

One of the primary links is that of the hunt: “Socrates recommends the practice of philosophy, imagined as a hunt, as the path to the love of wisdom where the goal may or may not be achieved” (61). The hunt was among the guardians’ tasks, which women would join. Townsend’s discussion in chapter 4 centers on the taming of the hunting women. She notes that women were intemperate, even more lustful than men, according to “common Greek report” (67–68). She suggests further that “women’s over-wild passions make them only dubiously tamable as citizens” and refers back to Socrates’s first city in speech (the city of utmost necessity) in Book II, from which, she claims, “women are absent” (68). Townsend asserts more than once that women are absent in the first city (2–3, 68, 74, 109), but that is inaccurate.

In Book II, Socrates proposes investigating justice in the city before turning to the individual. With the recognition that no one is self-sufficient, cities are formed to meet basic needs. In the first city, the essential minimum is “four or five men” (369d) but as needs increase, the city grows to include farmers, craftsmen, merchants, retailers, and wage earners. While no specific reference is made to women, their presence can be inferred by remarks about feasting together, bearing no more children than their means allow, and bequeathing a life to their offspring similar to theirs that is marked by living at peace, in good health, and dying at a ripe age (372a, d). Townsend asks in the introduction, “why aren’t women everywhere and present from the beginning?” (2), yet women are present in the first city, albeit in a private capacity. Contrary to Townsend’s assertion that women are wild in the private setting, Socrates’s description of the life bequeathed to the offspring suggests that the harmony in the first city is in both the public and private realms.

Socrates introduces a prominent theme in the first city that provides insight into the role of women in a private setting, that of “one man, one art” (370b). It is based upon the principle that differences in nature make one better suited to a single task or profession. Far from the first city being “comically limited” (74), as Townsend suggests, or women’s alleged absence constituting

“another humorous deficiency” (75), this important principle in the *Republic* of “one man, one art” is established and applied consistently in the first city. This is seen in women bearing and raising children at home as well as in the fact that all of the other professions are assigned to men in accordance with their nature. The principle also appears in several later discussions, including the one linking it to the parts of the soul (586e) and the one defining justice as having and doing one’s own and not meddling (433–435b). The city that Socrates also refers to as true and healthy (372e) is not as easily dismissed as Townsend suggests.

Another instance where women are described in a private setting is in Book VIII, where Socrates points to the actions of women in the timocratic and oligarchic cities as contributing to the regime’s downfall (549d, 550d). Socrates has come full circle. Women are in a private capacity and are as moderate as the men in the healthy city, but they contribute, along with the men, to the decline in the bad cities. In Townsend’s efforts to persuade that the private is not desirable, she links the philosopher, the housewife, and the tyrant. Whereas one pities the plight of philosophy in isolation, she writes, “it is also the isolation the tyrant and the housewife possess, where alone in solitude, the tyrant finds it easier to give reign to his worst desires. . . . It is the paradox that even being kept within the walls of a house, one’s privacy can take on this wild quality.” Further: “The souls of women are left disordered, without the tempering effects of justice in the soul” (113–14). Socrates’s “one man, one art” proposal in the first city counters Townsend’s argument: “That rule we set down at the beginning as to what must be done in everything when we were founding our city—this, or a certain form of it, is, in my opinion, justice. Surely we set down and often said, if you remember, that each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit” (433a). This does not apply only to men. Socrates asks Glaucon, “Or is the city done the most good by the fact that—in the case of child, woman, slave, freeman, craftsman, ruler and ruled—each one minded his own business and wasn’t a busybody?” (433d). This exchange is part of a larger discussion about virtue in Book IV in the presentation of the second city, the city with a fever, but it refers back to the principle presented in the first city. The political problem of women being “unregulated by the city” (110) that Townsend argues is present owing to their private life is thus addressed by Socrates. He presents an alternative solution to the political problem by looking back to the first city.

Townsend does offer an explanation of how the wildness of women is tamed and their activity redirected toward the public good by arguing that the virtue that will clothe the women who exercise naked “will be Socratic in nature” (140). The link that she established between the First and Third Waves or between women and philosophy comes to fruition at this point: “Socrates’ robes of virtue wrap women’s concerns up into Socratic ones” (143). To respond to the challenge that only a few will take up philosophy, Townsend explains that the *Republic* invites all readers to participate. She praises Socrates, whose heavenly polity offers “hope and promise for individual human women to follow its laws and no other” (149). She also praises Plato’s *Republic* more broadly, as “one of the profound liberators of human women our reading selves have ever seen because it proposes to liberate all human beings by means of justice in the soul” (149). Townsend’s book encourages the reader to reexamine Plato’s *Republic* in light of her arguments.

Frederick Lawrence, *The Fragility of Consciousness: Faith, Reason, and the Human Good*. Edited by Randall S. Rosenberg and Kevin Vander Schel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017, 456 pp., \$55.85 (cloth).

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Frederick Lawrence is not a household name in Catholic theology or political philosophy, and yet he is something of a Mr. Belvedere or a (brilliant) Forrest Gump, having lived in Rome while the sessions of the Second Vatican Council were taking place and having studied under or worked with such luminaries as Bernard Lonergan, Karl Barth, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Eric Voegelin, Johann Baptist Metz, René Girard, and Ernest Fortin (who subsequently introduced Lawrence to the writings of Leo Strauss). Lawrence's limited visibility is partly owed to his devotion to his students at Boston College, where he has been teaching since 1971, and partly to his direction of the annual and weekend "Lonergan workshops" (which he founded in 1973) and his editing of the proceedings for *The Lonergan Workshop Journal*.

Lawrence has also chosen as his sole means of wider communication the scholarly essay and the academic presentation—until now. *The Fragility of Consciousness* marks Lawrence's first monograph. The fruit of decades of theological reflection on contemporary topics and challenges, the twelve essays that comprise this volume range from some of Lawrence's better-known published pieces to previously rare unpublished works. Within these pages one will find sophisticated engagements of major figures, including Heidegger, Voegelin, Gadamer, Habermas, Benedict XVI, and of course, Lonergan. Yet as editors Randall S. Rosenberg and Kevin Vander Schel note, emerging from this array of interlocutions are three broad thematic lines: the practice of conversation, the interplay of faith and reason, and the crisis of culture (xx).

Readers of *Interpretation* are most likely to be drawn to two essays in particular: “A Jewish and Christian Approach to the Problematic of Jerusalem and Athens: Leo Strauss and Bernard Lonergan” and “The Recovery of Theology in a Political Mode: The Example of Ernest L. Fortin, AA.”

“A Jewish and Christian Approach” (72–159) first appeared in *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy and Education* in 2008. Despite its hefty weigh-in at eighty-seven pages, the essay is a tour de force that never loses a rather breathless momentum. Lawrence’s central thesis is that Strauss’s “three waves of modernity” and Lonergan’s “longer cycle of decline” have much in common and can even be seen as complementary (117; see 118). Yet despite their similar analyses of modernity, Strauss and Lonergan have significantly different views of philosophy and theology.

Lawrence is especially lucid when surveying the development of Strauss’s political philosophy through Strauss’s work on Heidegger, Lessing, Spinoza, Hobbes, Maimonides, and Alfarabi. Lawrence’s summaries of Strauss on faith and reason, premodern and modern rationalism, and the political drawbacks of Christianity are, it seems to me, well grounded and balanced. He detects a voluntarist strain in Strauss’s views on God and religion, and he suspects a “conceptualist” understanding of knowledge operative in Strauss’s philosophy. But Lawrence, who is respectful of Strauss to the point of being deferential, is careful not to draw any hard conclusions, partly out of charity and partly out of a genuine uncertainty about the evidence of Strauss’s writings as well as the conflicting accounts of his disciples. Strauss himself, for example, provides two very different translations of *noēsis noēseōs*—an Aristotelian phrase in the *Metaphysics* crucial to Lawrence’s argument. The translation “thought thinking thought” moves in a conceptualist direction, while the translation “understanding of understanding” points to a (healthier) “intellectualist” direction.

It is when Lawrence explains Lonergan’s cognitional theory and theology that the article grows dense. This is not entirely Lawrence’s fault, for Lonergan’s vocabulary, carefully crafted to designate specific realities, is a curriculum unto itself. Further, Lonergan’s thought is an interlinking barrel of monkeys, and it is difficult to describe one monkey without describing another and still another. But Lawrence is able to land eventually in an interesting place. The most significant difference between Strauss and Lonergan, Lawrence argues, is their respective conceptions of divine transcendence and natural theology, with Strauss denying and Lonergan affirming the existence of both. The roots of this difference, in turn, can be traced to how each author

understands human understanding. For Strauss, who is “perhaps affected by conceptualism” (154), one cannot know that the whole is intelligible until one knows the whole, and since mortal man cannot know the whole, he must admit that the whole is unintelligible (112), thereby giving philosophy a tragic hue and making any reconciliation between Athens and Jerusalem impossible. Although Strauss has an impressive devotion to asking questions and affirming man’s “passionate desire to know everything about everything” (156–57), his possibly “truncated reduction of human knowing” (156) leads him to deny a human knowledge of divine transcendence or a supernatural solution that can complement and complete human knowing. Lonergan, on the other hand, would argue that it is impossible to affirm that parts of the whole are intelligible without implicitly affirming that the whole is intelligible; and if the whole is intelligible, so too is the intelligible principle of the whole, namely, God (see 154). Given that the human mind has the capacity to grasp this principle (albeit only through analogical knowledge), it behooves the philosopher precisely as a philosopher to remain open to a supernatural solution if he wishes to remain open to the truth. For Strauss, the turn to religious faith necessarily involves a “sacrifice of the intellect”; for Lonergan, it is when one *rejects* this turn that one sacrifices the full potential of the intellect.

“The Recovery of Theology” (278–95) is a previously unpublished piece written for a 2010 roundtable discussion at Boston College entitled “Immortal Longings: Reason, Faith, and Politics in the Work of Father Ernest Fortin.” Lawrence offers a fascinating reflection on Fortin based on over forty years of friendship. Regarding Fortin’s formation, Lawrence opines that although Fortin was a beneficiary of some of the best Catholic education offered prior to Vatican II, he never entirely accepted the neoscholastic manual tradition which, to paraphrase a memorable line from Saul Bellow, often turned the first fruits of genius into canned goods for the academy. But unlike many of his generation, neither did Fortin embrace the paradigms that were replacing neoscholasticism, namely, historical criticism and social-justice activism. Rather than espousing either a preconconciliar tradition that was atrophied and myopic or a postconciliar “tradition of polemics against tradition” (288), Fortin called for a “new way of reading old books” that required docility before past masters and a capacity for reading with great attention and fresh eyes, thereby allowing the author’s questions rather than one’s own to govern interpretation. By declining membership in both the old school and the new, Fortin “became a ‘sign of contradiction,’ a *vox clamans in deserto* in the world of contemporary Catholic philosophical and theological thought” (282).

Lawrence credits Fortin's singularity to two factors, one of which was to be expected. It was Allan Bloom, Fortin's lifelong friend, who introduced him to Leo Strauss, and it was Strauss who helped Fortin retain the best of what he had learned as a "teenage Thomist" while breaking new ground in other areas. But the second factor surprised me: Fortin's "capacity for admiration and for friendship" (283). Both personally and professionally, Fortin had a penchant for looking up to others, even would-be rivals, and never looking down on others, even ideological adversaries. It never occurred to me before, but his love of wonder was certainly tied to his generous heart; the combination gave him a boyish, unpretentious enthusiasm and open-mindedness that stayed with him throughout his life.

Fortin's "new way of reading old books" led him to do "theology in a political mode" (286), which includes a preference for discussing the polis over "culture," an exploration of how Christianity in some ways *heightens* the tension between Athens and Jerusalem, and a sensitivity to Christianity's apolitical and transpolitical dimensions. And like Strauss's and Bloom's understanding of political philosophy as "first philosophy," it also entails beginning "with a concrete analysis of the human soul in action" as a means of ascending to wisdom (285). Theology in a political mode, Lawrence opines, makes Fortin more similar to Alfarabi in his appropriation of philosophy than to the Aquinas of the neo-Thomists, but Fortin never sidelined his faith. "As a teacher, he did not parade, but neither did he hide, the fact that he was a priest," Lawrence writes. "He once explained to me that his aim was to teach the books in the curriculum with accuracy and integrity so that his students might just wonder and take time to think about why he was and remained a priest" (295).

All told, *The Fragility of Consciousness* is an outstanding collection of essays that highlight not only Fred Lawrence's genius and breadth but survey from a distinctive and promising point of view the great questions and doyens of our age. It is well worth a read, even if it will occasionally make your own consciousness feel more than fragile. My only regret is that the volume does not include Lawrence's "Leo Strauss and the Fourth Wave of Modernity," but interested readers can find that essay in *Leo Strauss and Judaism: Jerusalem and Athens Critically Revisited*, edited by David Novak (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017, xxxv + 577 pp., \$35.00 (hardcover).

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David Bentley Hart is without question today's most important public Christian intellectual here in the United States. A prolific writer often compared to G. K. Chesterton, his books include the 2010 *Atheist Delusions* (the most trenchant, and scathing, reply to the New Atheists) and the profound 2014 *The Experience of God*. His new translation of the New Testament proves again that he has the rare gift of making old things new in ways that are both deeply scholarly and delightfully provocative. Whether we agree or not with his conclusions (and those interested should read the highly critical review by the prominent New Testament scholar N. T. Wright in *Christian Century* and then Hart's reply on the blog *Eclectic Orthodoxy*), it would be a gross misjudgment not to pay attention.

"This is not a literary translation of the New Testament, much less a rendering for liturgical use.... Again and again, I have elected to produce an almost pitilessly literal translation." After all, he says, "my principal aim is to help awaken readers to mysteries and uncertainties and surprises in the New Testament documents that often lie wholly hidden from view beneath layers of received hermeneutical and theological tradition. And I would hope my translation would succeed, in many places, in making the familiar strange, novel, and perhaps newly compelling" (xvii). Hart's translation is remarkably successful in achieving these goals. For example, Matthew, Mark, and John include frequent tense shifts from the past to the present and back again, something regularly hidden by standard translations, and something that communicates a breathless immediacy to the storytelling. Consider Mark 15:20–24:

And when they had mocked him they stripped off the purple and put his clothing on him. And they lead him away so that they might crucify him. And they press into service a certain passerby coming in from the field, Simon the Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, so that he might carry his cross. And they bring him to the place Golgotha—which, being interpreted, means Skull’s Place. And they gave him wine infused with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucify him, and portion out his garments, casting a lot upon them regarding who would take what. And it was the third hour and they crucified him.

The more typical New International Version keeps everything at a distance in the past tense:

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

Translating tenses literally, leaving broken phrasing in place (such as the often “maladroit, broken, or impenetrable” Greek of Paul’s letters), and writing bad English (to mirror the “bad Greek” one “finds through the book of Revelation”) allows Hart to “do the police in different voices,” as he says, leaving his reader free to make of the unattributed allusion to Eliot, and to Dickens, what he or she will (xviii, xxiii). Luke feels entirely different from John, which in turn feels entirely different from Mark, and from Revelation. Hart allows us to experience a community driven to record its experiences with the best tools at hand and with the fire of inspiration shining through in spite of themselves.

This is not to say that Hart’s translation does not feel awkward as well as bracing and illuminating. He prefers “Madam” to “Woman” when Jesus addresses a woman as *γυνή*, since the Greek word is a polite term of respect where our “woman” sounds curt. Fair enough, though this means Jesus says to his mother Mary at the wedding feast, “What, Madam, is this to me and you? My hour has not yet arrived,” and to the woman he saves from stoning, “Madam, where are they? Does no one condemn you?” Hart himself suggests that “for many readers” his choice to replace “blessed” with “blissful” for *μακάριος* in order to capture the sense of divine delight of the Greek “will

prove the most insufferable decision” (566–67). “Blessed are the poor in spirit” becomes “How blissful the destitute, abject in spirit.”

Hart has a second purpose in aiming at a “pitilessly literal” translation. Besides searching for ways to reveal the intense individuality of the New Testament authors, he also (perhaps more importantly for him), wants a translation free of “intellectual prejudice,” the kind that shapes one’s translation according to a prior history of interpretation, leading the translator to choose words and phrases that reflect his or her own prior theological commitments. “In the end,” he says, “it may not be entirely possible to write a translation of scripture not shaped by later theological and doctrinal history. Even so, that is what I have attempted” (xvi).

Hart’s translation is prefaced with twenty-five pages of introductory material explaining his interpretive aims and some of the effects the process of translation had on him (such as a “new sense of the utter strangeness of the Christian vision of life in its first dawning” [xxiv]). At the end of the translation, Hart includes a twenty-five page “Concluding Scientific Postscript.” This postscript includes remarks on the authorship of the books of the New Testament (here he follows “the most credible current scholarship” [567], though with the reminder that this “is the work of someone who believes in divine inspiration” [576]), an extensive note on the problems of translation presented by the prologue to John’s Gospel, and a glossary of nineteen words that present important translation problems (at least for Hart).

In order to reflect the ambiguity of John’s prologue, he leaves *λόγος* untranslated, and includes three different forms of the word “god” (GOD, GOD, and god) in order to reflect the presence or absence of the definite article. Hart’s prologue is not pleasing English, but it does convey the complexity of the Greek and hence makes it impossible for the reader to think a translation into English is straightforward (which is Hart’s point, of course).

The glossary complicates Hart’s translation in more interesting ways, since it reveals his own “intellectual prejudices.” For example, his dissatisfaction with much of the western theological branch of Christianity (Hart himself is Orthodox), especially Calvinist forms of Protestantism, is obvious, as is his insistence that material wealth is much harder to square with Christian holiness than many modern Christians seem to think. For example, the first and longest entry, *αἰώνιος*, usually translated as “eternal” or “everlasting,” becomes “of” or “in” either “that Age” or “the Age” (543). This is justified by Hart’s careful explanation of the ambiguity of the Greek, but it

also matters for theological reasons, since removing the “eternal” and “everlasting” sense of the word makes it difficult if not impossible to argue that the New Testament explicitly supports the everlasting torment of the reprobate. Hart has universalist inclinations, and ensures that his translation allows this position. Whereas the King James Version translates Matthew 25:46 as “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal,” Hart writes “And these will go to the chastening of that Age, but the just to the life of that Age.” According to Revelation 14:11, in Hart’s translation, “And the smoke of their torment rises for ages of ages, and the ones who make obeisance to the beast and its image have no rest day and night, as does anyone who might receive the impress of its name.” Hart adds a footnote after “ages of ages”:

εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων (*eis aiōnas aiōnōn*). Everywhere else in Revelation, when John is speaking of final or everlasting things, he employs the standard phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων (*eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn*), with the definite articles: “unto *the* ages of *the* ages.” Here alone the articles are omitted, perhaps producing a weaker and more indefinite formula, one that might be read as meaning “for a very long time.”

When it comes to Christianity and wealth, rather than make the text appear more open to various interpretation, Hart’s translation choices emphasize the rejection of material goods and the divine happiness this makes possible. We have already seen that he prefers English words that emphasize abject poverty—“destitute” rather than “poor” for πτωχοί—and a translation of μακάριος that when combined with “destitute” yields a jarring combination of material impoverishment and divine joy: “Blissful are the destitute, abject in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). This also affects grammatical construals. The Revised Standard Version translates Luke 18:25–26 as “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ Those who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’” Rather than leave the referent of “who” somewhat vague, Hart instead says, “For it is easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.’ And those hearing this said, ‘Can any of them then be saved?’” Lest the reader miss the point, he adds a footnote: “καὶ τίς δύναται σωθῆναι (*kai tis dynatai sōthēnai*): often translated as ‘Who then can be saved?’ or ‘Can anyone then be saved?’ but I take the import (specifically as regards the τίς) to be ‘Can any [rich man] then be saved?’”

These are not exactly criticisms. After all, adding the footnote about the rich men not only emphasizes Hart’s preferred understanding of the passage,

but also alerts the reader to the complexity of the passage, and of course to the possibility that here Hart is making a mistake.

My one real criticism is that the notes, tremendously helpful and enlightening, are nevertheless so sparse. Matthew's Gospel includes only twenty-four, many of them very brief. I wish that Hart had taken Robert Alter's translations with commentary of the books of the Hebrew Bible as his model. Alter's editions change the way a reader experiences the Old Testament—text is set in a standard typeface, with only one column per page, on standard-weight paper, and with a commentary that addresses important textual difficulties and the literary as well as theological implications of the text. The physical experience of reading Hart's translation is similar to reading Alter's, but Hart's commentary provided in the notes is woefully sparse, even though what Hart does provide proves he would be a worthy rival for Alter (consider for example Hart's series of comments spread across the New Testament that draw attention to the texts that Christian tradition has put together in its development of the character of Satan).

But it is high praise indeed if a reader's main criticism is a wish that the author had done even more. David Bentley Hart's *New Testament* is, quite simply, a revelation.

Brian A. Smith, *Walker Percy and the Politics of the Wayfarer*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017, 230 pp., \$95 (cloth).

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Brian A. Smith's *Walker Percy and the Politics of the Wayfarer* is an extraordinary exploration of the writings of a sadly underappreciated observer of the American soul. Through his six novels, two essay collections, and genre-defying parody of a self-help book, Walker Percy diagnoses the unfulfilled longings that threaten to unhinge modern life. Smith offers a comprehensive look at this diverse corpus with an argument accessible even to Percy neophytes.

Like Alexis de Tocqueville before him, Walker Percy exists between two worlds, providing him a unique perspective on the eccentricities of modern life. As a child, following the untimely (and likely self-inflicted) deaths of both parents, a young Walker Percy found himself in the custody of one of the most instrumental figures in his life: William Alexander Percy. Affectionately known as "Uncle Will," William Alexander Percy presented young Walker with the mores of a southern gentleman, an affection for aristocracy, and the virtues of stoic resolve.¹ A youth spent under this tutelage would forever color the lens through which Percy perceived the world. Eventually, he left both Uncle Will and his southern home to pursue a medical degree at Columbia University. The plan was stymied when, after contracting tuberculosis, Percy was forced to spend several years recovering at a sanatorium in upstate New York. There, he (re)introduced himself to Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Catholicism, each of which had a profound impact on his life.²

¹ Percy writes of the experience: "It was to encounter...a complete, articulated view of the world as tragic as it was noble" (Patrick Samway, *Walker Percy: A Life* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997], 37).

² Samway, *Walker Percy*, 126.

He determined to set aside his long-held medical aspirations and become a novelist. Writing of this transition, Percy notes, “I gradually began to realize that as a scientist—a doctor, a pathologist—I knew so very much *about* man, but had little idea what man *is*.”³ Upon his recovery, Percy married, converted to Roman Catholicism, and returned to the South, where he established a new life as a writer.

These experiences presented Percy with an awareness of alternatives to the dominant narrative of American life. His stoic upbringing and Catholic faith would counterbalance the materialism so prevalent in the West. Likewise, he was familiar with the language and allure of modern science, but chose instead to devote his life to more humane studies. In short, having tasted and seen the best of both paradigms, Percy was uniquely poised to grasp the true strangeness of American life, but to couple this insight with an appreciation for its (sometimes hidden) virtues. Like the heroes of his novels, Percy is himself both an inheritor of and an outsider to his culture. A Tocquevillian disposition of friendly criticism undergirds Percy’s wry wit. As Tocqueville put it, “Men do not receive the truth from their enemies, and their friends scarcely offer it to them; that is why I have spoken it.”⁴ Percy’s advice comes from within liberal democracy, offering a remedy to our ills that is unexpected but not entirely unfamiliar.

Highlighting themes of alienation and homelessness, Smith frames each of Percy’s writings as a coming to grips with the inexplicable yearnings that move men to anxiety, boredom, or restlessness—even (and perhaps especially) amid material plenty.⁵ For Percy, to the extent that men recognize and accept this disquietude as a part of the human condition, they can get down to the business of simply living well. As the late Peter Lawler was so fond of reminding his students, we must become “at home with our homelessness.” Smith refers to this transient disposition as one of “wayfaring,” a state where men embrace the limitations of a life that is ultimately fleeting. One need consider only the titles of Percy’s nonfiction work to see the prominence of this theme: *Signposts in a Strange Land*, *The Message in the Bottle*, and *Lost in the Cosmos*. Within the bounds of finitude, searching for “complete solutions

³ Robert Coles, *Walker Percy: An American Search* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 65–66.

⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 400.

⁵ “Man tries unsuccessfully to fill this void [in his soul] with everything that surrounds him, seeking in absent things the help he cannot find in those that are present, but all are incapable of it. This infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite, immutable object, that is to say, God himself” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008], 52).

to life's persistent dilemmas" (xv) is counterproductive to truly attainable yet partial solutions. In this light, our yearnings serve a salutary purpose, calling attention to the friction between man and his environment and reminding him of his unique position in the cosmos. Unfortunately, modern man views his alienation as a challenge. Rather than live as a wayfarer, he attempts to dominate nature and re-create the world in his image—to make a home where there was none.⁶ When we mistake our yearnings for disorders to be treated, we compound both our frustration and our confusion when the project inevitably fails.

This identification of Percy's overarching project is not particularly novel, and Percy is quite transparent about his intentions. Smith's contribution is instead situating this thesis within the context of Percy's entire oeuvre, bridging his fiction and nonfiction works (xxii). He then ties Percy's diagnosis of the individual soul to a greater political framework. With such an expansive lens, Smith is able to sketch the outlines of a complete human society. Through careful development, he is able to offer extraordinary nuance as he details Percy's implicit philosophy of politics, considering the individual in relation to family, church, local community, and nation. Each of these communities offers a respite from the persistent suffering of this world and points the wayfarer towards a more permanent and transcendent home. However, as we will see, these havens can be (and frequently are) abused by men who do not understand our proper situation in the world.

Smith structures his work sequentially in order to address Percy's complete thesis, offering the reader a clear sense of the problem at hand, why it persists, and where we should go from here. Part 1, "Diagnosing the Malaise," presents Percy as "[carrying] the disposition of a pathologist into his work as a writer" (1). Part of this diagnosis is noting the excesses of current treatments: those that overemphasize ("immanent" theories) or underemphasize ("transcendent" theories) our embodiment. Each fails because it ignores the essential (and intractable) duality of man's embodied soul.

In part 2, "American Attempts at a Cure," Smith highlights the unique struggle Americans face in coming to self-knowledge. As part 1 explores how our Lockean philosophic inheritance pulls us toward the overreliance on scientific expertise, part 2 seems to suggest that our religious and aristocratic heritage (praised by Tocqueville) pulls us to an overreliance on communities.

⁶ This is consistent with Eric Voegelin's concern regarding our attempts to "immanentize the eschaton" in *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

Both forces could be salutary if moderated by appropriate expectations. Instead, we push them beyond their intended limits, asking of them perfect contentment rather than merely a temporary respite. The result is yet another bifurcation of the American soul. We ask too much of our political and social institutions, only to find ourselves ever disappointed. “Seeking a complete remedy for our alienation,” Smith observes, “we thrust ourselves into communities, and when they do not satisfy us, we frantically retreat into isolation” (55). This vacillation between solidarity and stoic individualism fuels a dangerously wanton spiritedness, bound to either a caricatured patriotism or honor. We are shaken out of our boredom only in moments of extraordinary severity—natural disasters, accidents, and other brushes with mortality. These moments bring temporary clarity but, unfortunately, they also propel us to a deep fascination with violence and ultimately with war. Smith seems to imply that one of Percy’s deepest concerns is that we will destroy ourselves simply because we can think of nothing better to do.

Finally, in part 3, “Coping with Alienation,” Smith offers a vision of reform for both human intellectual potential and our communal obligations. Through his stories Percy hoped to present readers with both a purified social science and a more moderate account of human institutions such as family, community, and faith. Smith uses these latter chapters to clarify Percy’s otherwise obscure fascination with semiotics by connecting the constructed yet transcendent nature of language to the similarly murky field of social science. As disciplines such as political science and psychology become increasingly analytic and empirical, they lose touch with the normative discovery that makes such questions worth asking in the first place. A zeal for measurement and proclamations of what new “studies show” discourages the revisitation of fundamental principles and definitions. Similarly, Smith points out Percy’s frequent use of “partial resolution” among his characters to highlight the incomplete nature of human contentment. It is through self-reflection and reconsideration that his characters come to understand both their brokenness and their potential, reminding the reader of Pascal’s uneasy reconciliation of man: “Man’s greatness lies in his capacity to recognize his wretchedness. A tree does not recognize its wretchedness. So it is wretched to know one is wretched, but there is greatness in the knowledge of one’s wretchedness.”⁷ It is a modest hope, but of firmer quality than empty promises of immanent perfection.

⁷ Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, 36.

Walker Percy and the Politics of the Wayfarer is a significant accomplishment and deserves careful reading. Smith has the uncanny ability to weave the disparate threads of Percy's writings into a cogent narrative understandable even to those less familiar with the author's work. Generous quotations offer context and clarity that frame Smith's argument in Percy's own witty cadence. Both Smith's thesis and his evidence are accessible without being pandering. Further, his endnotes are an extraordinarily helpful resource to those who do wish to dive deeper into the rabbit hole of Percy scholarship, and highlight connections to more traditional political philosophy. Those seeking a completely articulated political philosophy from Walker Percy may walk away from this book dissatisfied, but the fault lies with the nature of Percy's "partial resolutions" rather than Smith's analysis. Percy does not offer us a city in speech, nor indeed much of any structure for concrete law in a polis. Instead, he frames a human disposition, instructive for citizens and statesmen alike. As for Smith's work, perhaps the greatest among its many merits is that it whets the appetite just enough to entice readers to revisit Percy's novels yet again.

Doubting Progress

Matthew W. Slaboch, *A Road to Nowhere: The Idea of Progress and Its Critics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018, 208 pp., \$42.75 (cloth).

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In his recent book, Matthew W. Slaboch provides an original and erudite study of an eclectic and generally neglected group of thinkers. Neglected in part, according to Slaboch, because of their unorthodox antipathy towards the belief in “progress,” or “the belief that humans are capable of making lasting improvements—intellectual and scientific, material, moral, and cultural” (4). The study not only sheds valuable light on these thinkers and their contributions to political thought, but also offers a promising illustration of the kind of work that might be done in the burgeoning field of comparative political theory. Slaboch examines various critiques of progress as manifested across German, Russian, and American cultural contexts, with special focus on the criticisms leveled by Arthur Schopenhauer and Oswald Spengler, Leo Tolstoy and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Henry Adams and Christopher Lasch, respectively.

A Road to Nowhere begins with the claim that laypeople and students of political theory alike ought to take more seriously the “possibility that long-term, continued progress might be merely a dream,” or “the possibility that progress is more fiction than reality” (3–4). Such a claim, Slaboch acknowledges, is not in keeping with the spirit of modern political thought which traces its lineage to the Age of Enlightenment. Disparate modern thinkers have generally found common ground in their historical optimism, and the

political cultures and discourses shaped by such thinkers have proved overwhelmingly hospitable to the idea of progress. Only a few brave souls have dared to challenge the optimistic spirit of modernity. Slaboch argues that the time is ripe to turn our attention to these historical pessimists because an unusual sense of pessimism now pervades many Western liberal democracies, as evidenced in polling data and the rhetoric surrounding recent political events in the United States and Europe.

It should come as little surprise then that the first chapter of the book is devoted to a philosopher whose name is synonymous with pessimism. Slaboch does an admirable job here of situating his analysis of Arthur Schopenhauer's critique of progress within its German context. Although Schopenhauer showed relatively little interest in political philosophy over the course of his illustrious career, he articulated a philosophy of history that was passionately anti-Hegelian. He understood it was no accident that a transformation in the historical optimism of German thinkers took place between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, characterized by a shift from the cosmopolitan universalism of Kant and Herder to the chauvinistic nationalism of Fichte and Hegel. For Schopenhauer, this shift was the inevitable result of a sustained faith in progress: there is but a short distance between committing oneself to the vision of a better future and prostrating oneself before an earthly entity powerful enough to realize that vision, namely, the nation-state. Thus, Schopenhauer's critique of progress is bound up with his aversion to the nationalist and statist tendencies associated with the idea. As an alternative to the rectilinear conception of human history, Schopenhauer proposed a conception that cohered with his equally pessimistic metaphysics, in which the "will"—the unchanging essence of reality that unifies all being—animates the world as a blind life force that operates toward no apparent end. Schopenhauer's philosophy leaves no room for lasting happiness, and thus technological and economic advances cannot be said to contribute to man's satisfaction. At best, such developments can result only in boredom. At worst, they intensify human desire and produce restlessness through the sheer magnitude of alluring objects and fleeting pleasures that masquerade as heralds of human progress. Schopenhauer's prescription, given the absence of progress in human affairs, is for the individual to turn inward. Only by eschewing politics and living a life of aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful and sublime can individuals find some respite from a world that is blind and deaf to man's longing for consummation.

In chapter 2, Slaboch examines the idea of progress in nineteenth-century Russian thought, and once again provides an impressively concise overview of the relevant context. For Russian thinkers living in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, ideas about progress were often bound up with questions of Russian identity and the proper Russian stance towards the West. In the public discourse that ensued, “Westernizers” believed the key to Russian progress would be found in embracing the secular rationalism of European thinkers and the political activism of European revolutionaries. “Slavophiles,” on the other hand, believed that limitless progress lay in the direction of communal solidarity and the spiritual values of the Orthodox Church, as against the individualism and materialism associated with European thought. Both sides agreed, however, that in the coming years Russia was destined to become a nation of world-historical significance, and would share in the progressive development that was so evident among their Western neighbors. In this context, Leo Tolstoy stands out for rejecting the idea of progress in his novels and autobiographical writings, and Slaboch provides a fine analysis of the subtle criticisms of progress that emerge throughout *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. An admirer of Schopenhauer, Tolstoy believed that academic historians had failed to identify the forces at work in human history by attributing too much power to the free will of individuals while overlooking the unchanging role played by fatal necessity. For Tolstoy, blind mechanical laws govern man’s desires and thus his actions, without disclosing any discernible historical purpose. Yet while *historical* progress is a chimera, Tolstoy maintained that something resembling it operates at the level of individuals, the fostering of which lies within the purview of religious faith. Tolstoy’s views on fate and faith culminated in a philosophy of Christian anarcho-pacifism. In a manner reminiscent of Schopenhauer, Tolstoy advocated for the turning away from politics in order to focus on inward spiritual progress. Slaboch rounds out the chapter with an insightful contrast between Tolstoy’s criticism of progress and those of Tzar Nicholas I, a conservative autocrat, and Nikolai Danilevsky, a cyclical theorist and ardent proponent of pan-Slav unification, to illustrate that historical pessimism is amenable to a variety of political prescriptions.

Turning in chapter 3 to America, Slaboch draws a similar contrast between the criticisms of progress leveled by the historian Henry Adams and his brother Brooks. While adopting an interpretation of the American founding that emphasizes a commonly held belief in progress among the founders, and highlighting the general ubiquity of historical optimism in early American political culture, Slaboch focuses primarily on the proponents

of progress among nineteenth-century American historians. Not only were most historians optimists, but they interpreted human progress in light of the exceptional nature of American democracy. For those like George Bancroft and John Lothrop Motley, progress was identical with the spread of liberty and equality as the principles of social organization, the future advancement of which depended largely on the vanguard role of the American democracy in world history. As the study of history became more professionalized in the late nineteenth century and historians strove to become more scientific, those like John Fiske and Herbert Baxter Adams appropriated the language of evolutionary biology to defend notions of progress in which the American nation still played a central, even critical role. Unlike his peers, Henry Adams (also a close reader of Schopenhauer) was an unflinching critic of progress. Slaboch argues persuasively that Adams's 1880 novel *Democracy* indicates the degree to which his historical pessimism was linked to an aversion toward democracy. Where others saw the American model as a beacon of human progress, Adams saw democracy as corrupt and inefficient, an indicator of decadence. Being as scientific-minded in his approach to history as his late nineteenth-century peers, he eschewed the language of biology in favor of that of physics. For Adams, physics teaches of "the constant dissipation of energy" and the universal law that "all grow old and die"—lessons which can be applied to human history as aptly as those of biological evolution (80). Far from progressing, human history tends towards decline and eventual catastrophe. Henry's brother Brooks Adams, also a historian, agreed that humanity is largely governed by laws beyond its control which are guiding it toward a cataclysmic end. But whereas Henry's political conclusion was weary resignation in the face of democratic decadence, Brooks argued that American imperialism could provide a temporary solution, staving off for a time the inevitable collapse.

The final chapter augments the comparative approach of the whole by adding a cross-temporal dimension to the study. Here, Slaboch examines twentieth-century critiques of progress from each of the cultural contexts treated earlier. In the German context, Oswald Spengler elaborated a cyclical philosophy of history that allowed for the rising of particular cultures within a broader framework of civilizational decline. On this basis Spengler could remain generally pessimistic, while optimistically advocating for German nationalism and praising the fascist leadership of Benito Mussolini as a model of the political "Caesarism" needed for a nation to rise in the midst of surrounding decadence. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, on the other hand, remained much closer to his predecessor Tolstoy in his historical pessimism, rejecting

grand political solutions to the human condition and instead locating the true phenomenon of human progress in the soul of the individual. His lack of faith in the Enlightenment promise of limitless human development was shared by his American contemporary Christopher Lasch, who argued that “the modern conception of progress depends on a positive assessment of the proliferation of wants” that is no longer plausible (105). While equally pessimistic about the trajectory of modern history, Lasch too found a glimmer of hope in certain nonpolitical solutions at the level of the individual, family, and local community.

Slaboch’s most significant substantive conclusion is to establish a link between certain forms of historical pessimism and corresponding proposals for action. The pattern he finds does not parallel national or cultural context; rather, the political prescriptions seem to depend “on whether the authors in question view history as a bumpy but straight road to nowhere (or worse, to hell), or whether they discern in the passing of time a pattern of recurring hills and dales” (111). Pessimists of the former sort tend to be “antipolitical thinkers who seek refuge in art, religion, or intellectual pursuits,” while the “cyclical theorists” are generally “receptive to grand political projects” and tend to “argue that their own nations are fated to play important roles in global affairs” (111–12). Slaboch seems rather sympathetic to the antipolitical thinkers and their conclusions, entertaining the possibility that a significant amount of political disengagement or nonparticipation might arise from principled stances rather than mere political ignorance or apathy (116–17). While Leo Strauss presented “return” as the fundamental alternative to “progress,” Slaboch presents a third alternative: “withdrawal.” Yet the prudence of this alternative is not self-evident, and its potential ramifications seem to demand further reflection.

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Matthew Slaboch's book is a timely response to our disenchanted historical moment—the hung-over morning after the “end of history” (6). In fact, as one plausible way of counting would have it, this is our second morning-after: the Gulag and the Holocaust woke us up after Hegel, and now, after Fukuyama's Hegel-lite version, terrorism, nationalism, and a depressing series of political earthquakes in the West are doing the job. To these two moments correspond two night-before feasts of progress: the first was a nineteenth-century *philosophy* of history and the second was a twentieth-century *political* tale spun out of that earlier act of philosophical braggadocio. These two are nicely reflected in Slaboch's account, which focuses on the nineteenth-century spoilsports—Arthur Schopenhauer, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry Adams in Germany, Russia, and America, respectively—while their twentieth-century successors—Oswald Spengler, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Christopher Lasch—are given a brusquer treatment in a separate chapter. Neatly, the Germans are the philosophers, the Russians are the writers, and the Americans are the historians. The book may be read as a kind of reconciliation with our second hangover, marked by plunging rates of political participation and ever larger cracks in the facade of democratic representation. It may just be, says Slaboch, that nonparticipation (117), for example, may come with its own silver lining. Although Slaboch does not say so explicitly, it is possible to perceive through the detritus of progress new possibilities for a reasonable way of life. But—and here comes the crucial *but*—in order to see that silver lining, we must refuse to collapse reason into politics, that is, to turn the political into *the* vehicle of progress.

If Slaboch's main aim is to show that critics of progress were "not mere defeatists" (4), then he has succeeded. He divides his pessimists into two groups: "critics of politics," who see history as a (somewhat) straight line with no happy end, and "cyclical theorists," who are not averse to political engagement (111). Interestingly, the critics are the heroes of the book while cyclical theorists play more of a background role—Brooks Adams, Oswald Spengler, and Nikolai Danilevsky count among them. The reason for that coincidence remains unclear, but that may not be a drawback; the book after all also aims to speak to "our situation." Slaboch moves comparatively across cultures—three great ones—and along them, from culture, to thinker, then to his heirs (in the case of Schopenhauer, for example, Nietzsche and Buckhardt), allowing the reader to get a sense of different cultural notions of progress and their interrogation by the pessimist or declinist heroes of the book. That these moves—backwards, forwards, and sideways—occur without any jarring effects speaks to the virtuosity of Slaboch's narrative. He is undoubtedly a storyteller: the narrative flows, easy, self-assured, and even playful (cf. 88, 89), making the reading experience pleasant despite the daunting range of the materials.

But there may be such a thing as too much comparative methodological clarity, especially when it comes to philosophical materials. This is more the case when the materials are at their most philosophical, in the first chapter: Schopenhauer with his predecessors and interlocutors. Schopenhauer's polemics against the philosophies of history then in vogue remain unclear. Why exactly was Hegel a mere "scribbler of nonsense" or "common mind" (12)? Or, what is the meaning of key philosophical terms such as "the will" or "metaphysical optimism" (and how does the latter differ from "eudemonistic optimism," 19)? Schopenhauer's candidacy as a crown-critic of progressivism seems an obvious choice, but his apolitical thought makes him less so. If Schopenhauer "held politics in...low regard" (24), then why pick his thoughts on the matter? After all, the lowly things are hardly worthy of engaging one's understanding. No wonder then that Schopenhauer's statements on political things such as popular participation, property rights, and the free press (24) fall rather flat. His mind was elsewhere.

And this elsewhere—philosophy—is sorely missing in the treatment of both Schopenhauer and his context. Slaboch's contextualizing discussion skips a bit too quickly along the surface. We learn, for example, that the nice Kant was not as nice as Herder, because the former was more state-centric and his cosmopolitanism less sincere (14–15). These piecemeal observations,

I suspect, follow from the refusal to grapple with the philosophical core of their thought (in the case of Kant, for example, man's "unsocial sociability"¹ as the irrational heart of progress which raises questions about its meaning and destination that are left untouched in the book). But, if these observations from outside the materials may be unwished for in the case of Kant, they become seriously detrimental in the case of Hegel. Here Slaboch is peculiarly unable to come clean about the sources of his own convictions. To say that Hegel should have perhaps seen "the state as something that limits its individual freedoms, as people often do" (17), or to depict him as a nationalist (16), is to ignore Hegel *tout court*. Hegel's thought had nothing to do with prescriptive philosophy; for him the legitimacy of the given—that is, of modernity and the state—is precisely the problem. But the difference is that, contrary to the American constitutional and the larger Lockean tradition, on which Slaboch often leans, he does not begin from a predetermined notion of freedom which would then allow him to think a state appropriate to that principle—whether "fat," in Schopenhauer's lingo, or lean and mean, in the Founders' variety. I suspect that by ignoring Hegel, Slaboch not only denies himself a powerful tool for understanding the theme of his book—the meaning and end of progress—but he commits the cardinal sin of progressive thought: to understand others not as they understood themselves.

Even if the price becomes less steep, the lightness continues with Schopenhauer's heirs. Is it possible to grapple with Nietzsche's view of progress without consideration of its final product, *Zarathustra's* "last men"? The discussion is not without interest, however. It underlines, strikingly, that the more enthusiastic the Germans' embrace of the philosophical notion of progress grew, the more regressive German politics became; the two, as ever, did not go hand in hand. Surely there is a lesson for us somewhere in there.

But as we ascend from the dark, heavy thoughts of the Teutons to the spirited intellectualism of the Russians, the strengths of Slaboch's narrative skills come more into evidence: at once synthetic and graceful, the narrative starts moving in ever greater harmony with the materials. While there are bones to pick along the way—can we, for example, make sense of Dostoyevsky's faith in "universal brotherhood" (49) without his religiosity?—the story flows pleasantly and productively. The succinct analysis of the unity

¹ See the Fourth Proposition in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–45.

of Tolstoy's fiction through its metaphors and symbolisms is enriched by its placement in the Russian cultural context.

The book then comes completely on its own into the unbounded pessimism of Henry Adams and its American context.² The story of Adams's rigorously pessimistic—and hence downright “un-American,” if we may be permitted the McCarthyism—view of his country's singular experiment in democracy flows with analytical and narrative rigor. Not content with the evidence presented to his senses and elaborated in his fiction, Adams turned to history for explanation, running into paradoxes along the way—paradoxes that paralyzed him, but not his brother Brooks. What was it about Adams's first-rate intellect that held him continuously back? Does this paralysis hint at a contradiction in Adams's psyche: here was, perhaps, a philosophic psyche—“a born spectator,” Judith Shklar calls him³—committed to the world of action in a Puritan milieu where the good was measured by its use? Be that as it may, the dialogue between Henry and Brooks tells us a great deal about the American version of antiprogressivism.

Moving to the whole of Slaboch's project, there seems to be an originary confusion that underlies what otherwise is a wonderful and in large part well-executed project. Slaboch, it seems to me, conflates the philosophical nature of the idea of the “end of history” with the political thesis that considers it disproven by actual history (6). Perhaps the misunderstanding may be gestured at not by what is in his analysis, but by what has been left out of it. The meaning of the concepts that are present in the book—progress,⁴ history, metaphysical optimism/pessimism, etc.—for the authors and for Slaboch himself is only sporadically clarified. Moreover, two concepts are conspicuously absent in this lineup: technology and time. If we are to meaningfully tackle the first two questions of the book on the meaning and end of progress (4), these two concepts almost impose themselves on any answer. And they show the question of progress to be of deeply philosophical import. Technology is decisive in two senses: first, because it brings about the necessarily progressive nature of the contemporary world, and second, because it abolishes the natural limits

² Here too a bit more unpacking may have helped; certainly, the idea of progress was ubiquitous in America (67), but this—be it of the religious Whitfieldian or the political Jeffersonian variety—was radically unlike Hegel's philosophical or the totalitarians' political idea of progress.

³ Judith Shklar, “*The Education of Henry Adams*, by Henry Adams,” in *Redeeming American Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 81.

⁴ While Slaboch justifies his lack of definition (116), the effort to untangle the philosophical from the political dimensions would have been appropriate to the materials.

of human action while transforming its principle. That is, under its rule the very nature of human life is up for grabs. Its progressivism is therefore qualified in a twofold sense: First, it does not permit an end state; technology is the overcoming of every technologically constituted resting point. Second, and incomprehensibly for us, it abolishes the very engine of progress, that is to say, action (or Kant's "unsocial sociability"). Progressive techno-civilization thus becomes, as Slaboch's title has it, *the* "road to nowhere." Yet, at the same time, technology *is* a sort of destination; an infinite point where, from this side of history, it furnishes the only "authoritative allocation of values" (morals) and, hence, power (politics) for us. As Nietzsche made terrifyingly clear, to that end point belongs a *justice* (of the strong), a *principle* (efficiency), and, accordingly, a *disorder* ("immense" or unlimited wars). It is, therefore, a complete world. Meditating—for thinking through may well be made impossible by our incapacity to grasp the look (*eidos*) of techno-being—on this paradox may well be a precondition for grappling with the question of progress as that question arises for us.

The other missing concept is time. The experience of time is presumed by the problem of progress; whether it is the historically finite and linear time of Christianity or the progressive linear time of the Enlightenment, the experience of time bears directly on the kinds of progress available *in* time. To illustrate: techno-progress, as a reading of Hegel would have it, abolishes time, and with it science and therefore progress.⁵ More immediately, however, unpacking the experiences of time of the thinkers in question would strengthen, I suspect, our understanding of the kinds of progress presupposed by each.

With these two gaps in mind, the book skirts around *the* question most important for us: whether we inhabitants of the "new world"⁶ are on the way to becoming sages or last men. Slaboch thus domesticates the problem of progress to the point where it becomes unphilosophical and hence manageable. The elegance of this evasion, however, is more than enough cause for admiration.

⁵ See especially chapter 5 of Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 100–149.

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), sect. 11–12.

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