

Interpretation

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Reply to Devin Stauffer

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In his illuminating comments on my book, Devin Stauffer finds that I overstate the importance of technology in Strauss's account of modern thought; he notes that Strauss devotes overwhelming attention to the political and moral thought of the moderns—especially their lowering of the goals of political life, their emphasis on rights rather than duties, their attempt to bring about a more secular politics—and relative inattention in his published writings to Bacon and Descartes, even or especially in his many sketches of modernity. Stauffer implies then that for Bacon and Descartes, at least, technology was indeed “in the driver’s seat.” (Hence even according to Stauffer, to the extent that Strauss sees their thought at the heart of modernity, he sees modernity as technological.) Stauffer adds that I go too far in calling Machiavelli “the founder of the technological project of putting theoretical science in the service of the political goal of the conquest of nature,” or as the man who thereby “launched modernity and its move toward democratic politics.”

While I find Stauffer’s critique very helpful, I still think Strauss sees technology as fundamental to modern thought, and Machiavelli as pointing the way toward it. In the relatively late autobiographical “Preface” to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, for example (1965), Strauss speaks of “the fundamental modern project (man’s conquest of nature for the sake of the relief of man’s estate)” (2) and says later, “The modern project as understood by Bacon, Descartes and Hobbes demands that man should become the master and owner of nature; or that philosophy or science should cease to be essentially theoretical” (15).¹ Moreover, the distinction that Stauffer implies between technology

¹ See also Leo Strauss, “German Nihilism,” ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (1999): 363: “The situation of modern civilisation in general, and of its backbone, which is modern science, both natural and civil in particular. . .”

and political philosophy in Strauss's understanding of the moderns disappears when one considers the fact that for Strauss the "lowering of the goals" of political life is itself an aspect of a technological project. In modernity, "the political problem becomes a technical problem."² This extends to the thought of Locke and his liberation of an economics of plenty,³ and (as we will see below) even to the political thought of Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, in their successive attempts to correct or "mitigate" Machiavelli's attempt to make the right social order "automatic." In highlighting this in his many comprehensive statements about modernity or the "modern project" Strauss stresses the moderns' break with the ancients;⁴ he denies the continuity of the thought of

² Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity," in *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*, ed. Hilail Gildin (Indianapolis, IN: Pegasus, 1975), 87: "chance can be conquered or corrupt matter can be transformed into incorrupt matter. There is a guarantee for the solution of the political problem because a) the goal is lower, i.e., in harmony with what most men actually desire and b) chance can be conquered. The political problem becomes a technical problem." As Hobbes puts it, "when commonwealths come to be dissolved by intestine discord, the fault is not in men as they are the matter but as they are the makers of them." See also 89: "The characteristics of the first wave of modernity were the reduction of the moral and political problem to a technical problem, and the concept of nature as in need of being overlaid by civilization as a mere artifact."

³ Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?," in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 49: "Machiavelli's discovery or invention of the need for an immoral or amoral substitute for morality, became victorious through Locke's discovery or invention that that substitute is acquisitiveness. Here we have an utterly selfish passion whose satisfaction does not require the spilling of any blood and whose effect is the improvement of the lot of all. In other words, the solution of the political problem by economic means is the most elegant solution, once one accepts Machiavelli's premise: economism is Machiavellianism come of age." Consider also *ibid.*, 37: "the economy of plenty presupposes the emancipation of technology from moral and political control." And see "Three Waves of Modernity," 89: "Already in Hobbes himself the natural right to self-preservation includes the right to 'corporeal liberty' and to a condition in which man is not weary of life: it approaches the right to comfortable self-preservation which is the pivot of Locke's teaching. I can here only assert that the increased emphasis on economics is a consequence of this. Eventually we arrive at the view that universal affluence and peace is the necessary and sufficient condition of perfect justice."

⁴ So, for example, Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 3–4: "According to the modern project, philosophy or science was no longer to be understood as essentially contemplative and proud but as active and charitable; it was to be in the service of the relief of man's estate; it was to be cultivated for the sake of human power; it was to enable man to become the master and owner of nature through the intellectual conquest of nature. Philosophy or science should make progress toward ever greater prosperity; it thus should enable everyone to share in all the advantages of society or life and therewith give full effect to everyone's natural right to comfortable self-preservation and all that that right entails or to everyone's natural right to develop all his faculties fully in concert with everyone else's doing the same." And Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 463: "modern philosophy has a radically different character. In modern times the gulf between philosophy and the city was bridged, or believed to have been bridged, by two innovations: (1) the ends of the philosopher and the nonphilosopher are identical, because philosophy is in the service of the relief of man's estate, or 'science for the sake of power'; (2) philosophy can fulfill its salutary function only if its results are diffused among the nonphilosophers, if popular enlightenment is possible. The high point was reached in Kant's teaching on the primacy of practical, i.e., moral

Plato and Aristotle with that of the moderns, a continuity claimed by men as different as Martin Heidegger and Harry Jaffa.

Strauss consistently presents Machiavelli as having launched this attempt to make the best society automatic, or the treatment of the political problem as a technical problem.⁵ This moved me to say that for Strauss Machiavelli begins the shift, important for the rise of technological thinking, from final to efficient cause, as Strauss says explicitly in his second Walgreen lectures, which became the basis of *Thoughts on Machiavelli (TOM)*. Stauffer rightly stresses that the new natural science comes after Machiavelli, and he faults

reason, a teaching prepared to some extent by Rousseau: the one thing needful is a good will, and of a good will all men are equally capable.”

⁵ See “What Is Political Philosophy?,” 41: “Machiavelli consciously lowers the standards of social action. His lowering of the standards is meant to lead to a higher probability of actualization of that scheme which is constructed in accordance with the lowered standards. Thus, the dependence on chance is reduced: chance will be conquered.” This unity of Machiavellian “realism” with the attempt to conquer chance and thus guarantee the actualization of the right social order appears from the very beginning of Strauss’s study of Machiavelli. See “Natural Right Lecture to be delivered on January 19, 1946 in the General Seminar and in February 1946 in Annapolis” (Emmanuel Patard, ed. and intro., “Leo Strauss at the New School for Social Research (1938–1948): Essays, Lectures, and Courses on Ancient and Modern Political Philosophy” [doctoral diss., Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013], 400–402):

These aspects of modern natural right must remain paradoxical and bewildering, as long as one does not consider them in a broader context: in the context of the attempt made at the beginning of the modern period, of establishing a new science of politics.... The revolt of modern political philosophy, which was originated by Machiavelli, was directed against what we may call the utopian character of classical political philosophy: against its orientation by what would be the best-possible solution under the most favorable conditions, and against its inability or unwillingness to expect the actualisation of the best-possible from anything else but chance. Modern political philosophy as such, i.e. in so far as it does not merely continue the classical tradition, is a quest for a political order whose actualisation is probable, if not even certain. It is concerned with a guarantee of the actualisation of the desirable political order or with the conquest of chance. Both the classics and the moderns understand by the desirable order the natural order. But whereas for the classics the actualisation of the natural order is a matter of chance, for the moderns it is a necessity, or almost a necessity: it would come into being everywhere, by itself, but for foolish human intervention or ultimately for ignorance. Hence knowledge of the natural order, and diffusion of that knowledge, is the decisive means for actualising the natural order of society.... The element of chance and uncertainty which is implied in the unpredictably unequal natural distribution of wisdom and folly, is eliminated by the geometrical and systematic character of modern natural right.

See also 406:

Pre-modern natural right was not self-enforcing. An entirely different situation develops once people take their moral bearings by their natural rights. Once this is the case, the ruler’s transgressing the boundaries of natural law means nothing but infringement of the subjects’ rights, and this is practically identical with touching them where it hurts. Hence there is as if there were an automatic guarantee of the enforcement of the punitive clauses of natural right. Modern natural right is, almost, self-enforcing.

And it carries through to the end of Strauss’s presentations of modernity. See “Three Waves of Modernity,” 84: “Machiavelli opposes to the idealism of traditional political philosophy a realistic approach to political things. But this is only half of the truth (or in other words his realism is of a peculiar kind). The other half is stated by Machiavelli in these terms: fortuna is a woman who can be controlled by the use of force.”

me for equating the “efficient cause” with “the effectual truth”; he notes that the relevant passage (from the Walgreen lectures) on efficient cause that I quoted is omitted from *TOM*. I note in turn that Strauss does indeed equate “the effectual truth,” or the roots of political life, with “efficient cause” in his (published) presentation of Machiavelli in *Natural Right and History* (*NRH*). More than this: in an important and revealing note just before the sentence in which he does so, he ties it to Bacon’s call for attention to the “extreme case.”

In the course of describing, in chapter 5 of *NRH*, Hobbes’s philosophy, that is, his understanding of actualization of wisdom as free construction in a universe that is unintelligible and that forces man to be “sovereign” (175), Strauss introduces—as an aid in understanding the Hobbesian shift—his sketch of Machiavelli’s thought. It is in that sketch that Strauss makes reference to Bacon: “[Machiavelli] believes that the extreme case is more revealing of the roots of civil society and therefore of its true character than is the normal case.” The footnote (n13) to this sentence refers us to two pages of Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*.⁶ The subsequent sentence in *NRH* states quite clearly that for Machiavelli, “the root or the efficient cause takes the place of the end or of the purpose.” And the passage in Bacon to which Strauss’s preceding footnote directs us speaks of Bacon’s intention to find “irregularities” in nature’s “ordinary course of generations, productions, and motions,” “strange events of time and chance, or the effects of yet unknown properties, or the instances of exception to general kinds,” “heteroclitites or irregularities of nature,” in order to find “from the wonders of nature...the nearest

⁶ The passage in Bacon’s *The Advancement of Learning* begins as follows:

History of nature is of three sorts; of *nature in course*, of *nature erring* or *varying*, and of *nature altered* or *wrought*; that is, *history of creatures*, *history of marvels*, and *history of arts*. The first of these, no doubt, is extant, and that in good perfection; the two latter are handled so weakly and unprofitably, as I am moved to note them as deficient. For I find no sufficient or competent collection of the works of nature which have a digression and deflection from the ordinary course of generations, productions, and motions; whether they be singularities of place and region, or the strange events of time and chance, or the effects of yet unknown properties, or the instances of exception to general kinds. It is true, I find a number of books of fabulous experiments and secrets, and frivolous impostures for pleasure and strangeness; but a substantial and severe collection of the *heteroclitites* or *irregulars* of nature, well examined and described, I find not: especially not with due rejection of fables and popular errors: for as things now are, if an untruth in nature be once on foot, what by reason of the neglect of examination and countenance of antiquity, and what by reason of the use of the opinion in similitudes and ornaments of speech, it is never called down.

The use of this work, honoured with a precedent in Aristotle, is nothing less than to give contentment to the appetite of curious and vain wits, as the manner of Mirabilaries is to do; but for two reasons, both of great weight; the one to correct the partiality of axioms and opinions, which are commonly framed only upon common and familiar examples; the other because from the wonders of nature is the nearest intelligence and passage towards the wonders of art: for it is no more but by following, and as it were hounding nature in her wanderings to be able to lead her afterwards to the same place again.

intelligence and passage towards the wonders of art: for it is no more but by following, and as it were hounding nature in her wanderings to be able to lead her afterwards to the same place again.” That is, the purpose is to assist the scientific/artful *reordering*, by man, of “nature,” or what we have come to call technology. (That this will have a bearing on what are held to be “miracles of religion” Bacon suggests at the end of the two-page description.) In the conclusion to *TOM* Strauss indeed speaks only of “roots” and not of efficient causes. But he does not there say or suggest that Bacon misunderstood Machiavelli in this matter. He limits himself to saying that “The brain which can transform the political matter soon learns to think of the transformation of every matter or of the conquest of nature” (*TOM*, 297).

The Machiavellian impetus to the new science is even more clearly stated in “What Is Political Philosophy?” (“WIPP”), where Machiavelli’s need for and hidden agreement with the new science is observed:

[Machiavelli] assumed, but did not demonstrate, the untenable character of teleological natural science. He rejected the view that man must take his bearings by virtue, by his perfection, by his natural end; but this rejection required a criticism of the notion of natural ends. This proof was supplied, or was thought to be supplied, by the new natural science of the 17th century. There is a hidden kinship between Machiavelli’s political science and the new natural science. The classics had taken their bearings by the normal case as distinguished from the exception; Machiavelli effects his radical change in the understanding of political things by taking his bearings by the exception, by the extreme case. As appears from Bacon, there is a close connection between Machiavelli’s orientation and the notion of torturing nature, i.e., of the controlled experiment. (“WIPP,” 47)

As Strauss here indicates, the connection to the “Machiavellian orientation” is no mere speculation on his part but something to which Bacon himself points. And in Strauss’s “Note on ‘Some Critical Remarks on Man’s Science of Man,’” we can see why: Strauss refers the reader to a section of the *Advancement of Learning*⁷ that includes this statement of praise of Machiavelli by Bacon: “Is not the ground, which Machiavel wisely and largely discourseth concerning governments, that the way to establish and preserve them, is to

⁷ The note (number 24, at 632–33 of the Colen and Minkov edition [see note 16 below]) reads: “See *Advancement of Learning*, Everyman’s Library ed pp. 85, 88, and 94 [Book II, chap. 6, par. 1]. Cf. also the plan of Hobbes’s *De homine*. Cf. on the other hand Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* I-II, Prologue” (which shows that for Thomas, man being made in the image of God simply means that “he too is the principle of his actions, as having free will and control of his actions”).

reduce them *ad principia*, a rule in religion and nature, as well as in civil administration?”⁸ All of which allows us better to understand Strauss’s claim, in “Three Waves of Modernity,” that the emergence of modern natural science is part of the first, Machiavellian, wave, one that was “in harmony with his spirit.”⁹

Hobbes’s *political* philosophy takes up the Machiavellian task on the basis of the new science. The paragraph of *NRH* from which I have just quoted (on 179) is followed by one in which Strauss speaks of Hobbes’s application of science, of exact scientific knowledge, to natural law for the “guarantee of the right social order”:

It was the difficulty implied in the substitution of merely political virtue for moral virtue or the difficulty implied in Machiavelli’s admiration for the lupine policies of republican Rome that induced Hobbes to attempt the restoration of the moral principles of politics, i.e., of natural law, on the plane of Machiavelli’s “realism.” In making this attempt he was mindful of the fact that man cannot guarantee the actualization of the right social order if he does not have certain or exact or scientific knowledge of both the right social order and the conditions of its actualization.¹⁰

And in *The City and Man*, Strauss elaborates on this endeavor and the path that it took. In a digression (41–45) devoted to clarifying the difference between Aristotle’s presentation of the relation between man and the whole,

⁸ Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Everyman’s Library, 87. See also 91: “these be the two parts of natural philosophy—the inquisition of causes, and the production of effects; speculative, and operative; natural Science and natural prudence. For as in civil matters there is a wisdom of discourse and a wisdom of direction; so is it in natural.” And 93: “For as we divided natural philosophy in general into the inquiry of causes, and productions of effects, so that part which concerneth the inquiry of causes we do sub-divide according to the received and found division of causes; the one part, which is Physique, inquireth and handleth the material and efficient causes; and the other, which is Metaphysique, handleth the formal and final causes.”

⁹ Strauss, “Three Waves of Modernity,” 87.

¹⁰ *NRH*, 179. See also 183: “The profound change under consideration can be traced directly to Hobbes’s concern with a human guaranty for the actualization of the right social order or to his ‘realistic’ intention. The actualization of a social order that is defined in terms of man’s duties is necessarily uncertain and even improbable; such an order may well appear to be Utopian. Quite different is the case of a social order that is defined in terms of the rights of man.” And see 190–91: “Natural public law—*jus publicum universale seu naturale*—is a new discipline that emerged in the seventeenth century. It emerged in consequence of that radical change of orientation which we are trying to understand. Natural public law represents one of the two characteristically modern forms of political philosophy.” The origin of both Machiavellian “reason of state” politics and Hobbesian natural public law “is the concern with a right or sound order of society whose actualization is probable, if not certain, or does not depend on chance. Accordingly, they deliberately lower the goal of politics.”

on one hand, and the Cartesian goal of mastery of nature, on the other, he notes that modern political philosophy posits

natural laws as laws which *no one can* transgress because everyone is compelled to act according to them. Laws of the latter kind, it was hoped, would be the solid basis of a new kind of “normative” laws which as such can indeed be transgressed but are much less likely to be transgressed than the normative laws preached up by the tradition. The new kind of normative laws did no longer claim to be natural laws proper; they were *rational laws* in contradistinction to natural laws; they eventually become “ideals.” The ideal “exists” only by virtue of human reasoning or “figuring out”; it exists only “in speech.”...The rights of man are the moral equivalent of the *Ego cogitans*. The *Ego cogitans* has emancipated itself entirely from “the tutelage of nature” and eventually refuses to obey any law which it has not originated in its entirety or to dedicate itself to any “value” of which it does not know that it is its own creation.—¹¹

The ultimate goal of this technological-scientific politics, of the dissemination of the “mathematical knowledge of the principles of justice” (*NRH*, 199), of this “understanding and manipulating the mechanism of the passions,” of this effort to “guarantee the actualization of the right social order,” of this effort to ensure that “chance will be conquered” by “systematic philosophy issuing in systematic enlightenment,” as it comes to sight in Hobbes (*NRH*, 200), is the elimination of fear of “powers invisible,” civilizational atheism, the disenchantment of the world.¹² Man as maker was to replace God.

¹¹ Strauss, *City and Man*, 44–45. See also “The Problem of Socrates,” *Interpretation* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 326:

In the modern centuries there emerged a new kind of natural right [doctrine] which is based on the devaluation of nature; Hobbes’ state of nature is the best known example. Nature is here only a negative standard: that from which one should move *away*. On the basis of this, the law of reason or the moral law [as it was called] ceased to be natural law: nature is in no way a standard....

The prospect of a miraculous abolition or overcoming of the essential particularism for all men was held out in somewhat different ways by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. A *non-miraculous* overcoming was visualized in modern times by means of the conquest of nature and the universal recognition of a purely *rational nomos* [law], so that only the difference of languages remains.

¹² See *NRH*, 194–99:

In the words of Hobbes, “when [commonwealths] come to be dissolved, not by external violence, but intestine disorder, the fault is not in men, as they are the matter, but as they are the makers, and orderers of them.” Man as the maker of civil society can solve once and for all the problem inherent in man as the matter of civil society. Man can guarantee the actualization of the right social order because he is able to conquer human nature by understanding and manipulating the mechanism of the passions. (*NRH*, 194)

The predominance of the concern with “power” is therefore only the reverse of a relative indifference to the *actus*, and this means to the purposes for which man’s “physical” as well as his “legal” power is or ought to be used. This indifference can be traced directly to Hobbes’s concern with an exact or scientific political

Through modern science the technological spirit comes to affect both political philosophy and philosophy simply. Modern philosophy, originally the same as modern science and later bowing to the authority of modern science (its most successful part), becomes “a kind of conscience or consciousness of modern science,”¹³ and is as such “anthropocentric.” It becomes philosophy of the human mind, explaining how the mind prescribes nature its laws:

The underlying idea, which shows itself not in all places clearly but in some places very clearly, is that all truths or all meaning, all order, all beauty, originate in the thinking subject, in human thought, in man. Some famous formulations: “We know only what we make”—Hobbes. “Understanding prescribes nature its laws”—Kant. “I have discovered a spontaneity, little known previously, of the monads of the thoughts”—Leibniz.¹⁴

Yet Stauffer helpfully reminds us that in *TOM* Strauss speaks of political society that Machiavelli wishes to bring about as one that is in “accord with nature.” But this does not settle the issue. For Bacon and for Hobbes, too, the new science of man that is to replace scholastic science is also understood to be the truly natural understanding.¹⁵ We must therefore ask: Is the teaching that Machiavelli is providing for the future conspirators—who will

teaching. (*NRH*, 195)

Power, as distinguished from the end for which power is used or ought to be used, becomes the central theme of political reflections by virtue of that limitation of horizon which is needed if there is to be a guaranty of the actualization of the right social order. (*NRH*, 195–96)

This implies that the whole scheme suggested by Hobbes requires for its operation the weakening or, rather, the elimination of the fear of invisible powers. It requires such a radical change of orientation as can be brought about only by the disenchantment of the world, by the diffusion of scientific knowledge, or by popular enlightenment. Hobbes’s is the first doctrine that necessarily and unmistakably points to a thoroughly “enlightened,” i.e., a-religious or atheistic society. (*NRH*, 199)

¹³ Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return?,” in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, 102.

¹⁴ Ibid. See also “Three Waves of Modernity,” 88: “not only can man transform corrupt human matter into inconvertible human matter, or conquer chance—all truth and meaning originate in man; they are not inherent in a cosmic order which exists independently of man’s activity. Correspondingly, poetry is no longer understood as inspired imitation or reproduction but as creativity. The purpose of science is reinterpreted: *propter potentiam*, for the relief of man’s estate, for the conquest of nature, for the maximum control, the systematic control of the natural conditions of human life. Conquest of nature implies that nature is the enemy, a chaos to be reduced to order; everything good is due to man’s labor rather than to nature’s gift.”

¹⁵ *NRH*, 78: “But the originators of modern thought still agreed with the classics in so far as they conceived of philosophy or science as the perfection of man’s natural understanding of the natural world. They differed from the classics in so far as they opposed the new philosophy or science, as the truly natural understanding of the world, to the perverted understanding of the world had by classical and medieval philosophy or science, or by ‘the school.’”

replace the republics and principalities based on the modes and orders of the unarmed prophet of Christianity, that is, the modes and orders of one according to whom the cosmic principle that they should imitate is Love—based on a single, *theoretical* science of man? For according to Strauss, the very notion that there is a single science of man is peculiar to the moderns. Aristotle, for example, presents us with two sciences of man: on one hand, *De anima* (part of physics) and on the other, the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, the latter of which constitute the “philosophy of the human things.” For Aristotle, the former considers human beings as they are in themselves, that is, theoretically, while the latter considers things as they are for man as man (not “straight” or “white,” for example, but “good” or “bad,” “noble” and “base,” “auspicious” or “inauspicious”). For Bacon and for Hobbes, there is only one (theoretical) science of man, man as maker, a science that is to be used for the sake of power, in the conquest of nature.¹⁶ It is not quite clear from Stauffer’s remarks where he thinks Machiavelli stands, according to Strauss, on this issue.

This may be traceable to a certain obscurity in Machiavelli’s argument, replicated by Strauss. But since Stauffer speaks of Machiavelli as having decided that the old aristocratic political strategy deployed by the ancients to support the philosophic life had failed—that there was a perceived need for a new strategy (“semiadvocacy of democracy”)—I suspect that he wishes to remind us that in Strauss’s presentation, Machiavelli is a philosopher, one who, no less than the ancients, considered not political life but at least a version of the theoretical life to be the best life by nature and even a gift of nature, and that his political project was not part of that life but rather designed to restore or enhance the political standing or dignity of that life. That is, behind Stauffer’s criticism of my presentation of Machiavelli as

¹⁶ See my chap. 2, note 5. The citation there included (Leo Strauss Papers, Box 14, Folder 9 “Note on ‘Some critical remarks on man’s science of man’”) is to a work that has been edited and published by José A. Colen and Svetozar Minkoff in “Leo Strauss on Social and Natural Science: Two Previously Unpublished Papers,” *Review of Politics* 76, no. 4 (2014): 619–33. See also “What Can We Learn from Political Theory?” (1942), ed. Nathan Tarcov, *Review of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007): 516:

The term “political theory” implies that there is such a thing as theoretical knowledge of things political. This implication is by no means self-evident. Formerly, all political knowledge was considered practical knowledge, and not theoretical knowledge. I recall the traditional division of the sciences into theoretical and practical sciences. According to that division, political philosophy, or political science, together with ethics and economics, belongs to the practical sciences, just as mathematics and the natural sciences belong to the theoretical sciences. Whoever uses the term “political theory” tacitly denies that traditional distinction. That denial means one of these two things or both of them: (1) the denial of the distinction between theoretical and practical sciences: all science is ultimately practical (*scientia propter potentiam*); (2) the basis of all reasonable practice is pure theory. A purely theoretical, detached knowledge of things political is the safest guide for political action, just as a purely theoretical, detached knowledge of things physical is the safest guide toward conquest of nature: this is the view underlying the very term political theory.

launching the modern, technological project is his awareness of two matters indicated but not trumpeted by Strauss: in truth, according to Aristotle we are the stepchild of nature, and in truth, according to Machiavelli the theoretical life appeared to be the right way of life by nature, and the benefiting of or elevation of the people through his teaching was simply a new way of securing and protecting, in changed circumstances, precisely that way of life. I acknowledge Stauffer's point and am grateful for the opportunity to be more specific.

Strauss indeed presents a Machiavelli for whom a version of the theoretical life is the best life according to nature, and a Machiavelli who engages in political philosophy in an effort to establish the rightness of that life: as did the ancients, Machiavelli looks at political life not as the ancient conventionalists did, and not theoretically, but rather from within a deliberately political perspective. Like the Socratics, he takes political life seriously, on its own terms, calling the reader's attention to publicly acceptable opinions about virtue and goodness (e.g., *TOM*, 236–37). By taking into account the public praise and blame that is accorded to the founder and to acquisition successful and unsuccessful, he is led to disclose to us political life from “perspective of founders.” He did not indeed call philosophy before the tribunal of the law but he did present, if not a dialectical, then at least a disputational account of the ends and deeds publicly pursued and praised and blamed by political men. The end result is a political justification of Machiavelli's own activity:

The highest glory goes to the discoverer of the all-important truth, of the truth regarding man and society, of the new modes and orders which are in accordance with nature. He can *justly claim* to be superior in virtue to all men and to be the greatest benefactor of all men. He can *justly claim* the glory generally given to more or less mythical founders. He looks at society not theoretically but, being the teacher of founders, in the perspective of founders. The desire for the highest glory, which is the factual truth of the natural desire for the common good and which animates the quest for the truth, demands that the detachment from human things be subordinated to a specific attachment or be replaced by that attachment. The perspective of the teacher of founders comprises the perspectives of both the tyrant and the republic. (*TOM*, 288, emphases added)

Machiavelli, on Strauss's reading, presents his activity as justified in the light of political understanding—as the highest example of the virtue of the founder or of the wholly new prince, a version of which is practiced by virtuous political rulers in Rome, for instance, and praised by the people, who likewise naturally seek to acquire.

In this perspective, “virtue in the highest sense, ‘extraordinary virtue,’ grandeur of mind and will, the pre-moral or trans-moral quality which distinguishes the great men from the rest of mankind, is a gift of nature. Such virtue, which is not chosen, compels a man to set himself high goals, and since such virtue is inseparable from the highest prudence, to set himself the wisest goal possible in the circumstances” (*TOM*, 246–47). Machiavelli is also said to be among those “imitating nature” who “will be filled with both gravity and levity but...will be free from fanaticism. They will not expect to find perfection or immortality anywhere except in works of art. They will regard as the virtue opposite to pride or arrogance, not humility, but humanity or generosity” (*TOM*, 193; cf. 243); they are men over whose *mind* chance has no power¹⁷ or who have “an ultimate superiority to every fear and every hope” (*TOM*, 220). “The excellence of a man who is the teacher of both princes and peoples, of the thinker who has discovered the modes and orders which are in accordance with nature, can be said to be the highest excellence of which man is capable” (*TOM*, 244). Perhaps Machiavelli thought that Plato would have agreed with his attempt through writings to be a teacher of conspirators (*TOM*, chap. 3, n187), or that Machiavelli, at heart an Aristotelean, keeps Aristotle in bounds by Bion (224–25). He certainly considered the world not created but eternal (202). Contrary to appearances, while he appealed to the youthful longing for glory in potential followers, Machiavelli himself saw clearly (if he did not clearly present) the limits of political life, the impossibility of immortal glory, and even offered implicit rejection of a conquest of nature¹⁸ in favor of an individual, philosophic life free of chance, one that moved between levity and gravity. That theoretical life was not at its core constructivist/anthropocentric but rather still under a cosmology; man does not prescribe nature its laws but discovers necessities. Machiavelli’s novelty consisted in allowing himself to submit to an enslaving degradation, somewhat comical, to bring about a needed new protection for the life led

¹⁷ *TOM*, 218: “Excellent men will rise above chance. Chance will have no power over them, over their minds. While their fortune varies, they will always remain the same. The dignity of man consists, not in conquering chance, but in independence. This freedom, this dignity, this genuine ‘good fortune’ can arise only from a man’s having knowledge of ‘the world,’ i.e., in particular of the place and significance of accidents. Contrary to what Machiavelli had indicated in his chapter on heavenly signs, such knowledge is available to him. Inner freedom from chance, an ultimate superiority to every fear and every hope, presupposes recognition of the true power of chance, of the natural necessities by virtue of which chance rules supreme within certain limits.”

¹⁸ *TOM*, 221: “He hardly sheds further light on Fortuna, or on chance, by saying at the end of the chapter that Fortuna is like a woman who can be vanquished by the right kind of man. For if Fortuna can be vanquished, man would seem to be able to become the master of the universe.”

in pursuit of wisdom.¹⁹ He did this by enlisting the people and especially lukewarm Christians in his battle against what he considered the doctrine of a tyrant God who casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. Machiavelli offers to youthful political men a supple and appealing teaching, one that appeals to their manliness and love of glory. It is a teaching that appears to understand virtue or human excellence along the lines of Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, but one that is in fact, as he indicates, much closer to that of the Socratic Xenophon, who like all Socratics understood the limits of speech and the need for brachial force and fraud. If Machiavelli makes us oblivious of the Socratic, non-Cyrus pole of Xenophon's thought, this does not mean that Machiavelli himself is oblivious of that pole; he is of course aware of it but thinks that, being ever compelled, it can take care of itself without reminders of the peak of human excellence.²⁰ It will be better able to do so with the destruction of Christendom, undertaken by means of a narrowing of the political horizon in order to get the necessary results, to achieve the "natural function of society," which is "to make men secure" and free, by presenting a new teaching concerning "virtue," one that "is natural." For that teaching's "ground is not the common good but the natural desire of each to acquire wealth and glory: men are praised or blamed also with a view to their being good or bad at acquiring" (*TOM*, 278). We can say that for Strauss, even if the movement between levity and gravity that characterizes the Machiavellian theoretical life can "seem" like a pale reflection of Plato's combination of seriousness and play, he shows us that at bottom, Machiavelli is a practitioner of the theoretical life and a proponent of its happiness. I might go still further: Machiavelli is presented by Strauss as having effected a "radical" break with the *tradition* of political philosophy in part because he attempted to "uproot the Great Tradition" (*TOM*, 59)—that is, to disclose its

¹⁹ *TOM*, 244: The "highest freedom cannot become effective if the thinker does not undergo what to him must be the most degrading of all servitudes."

²⁰ See *NRH*, 178: "Just as Hobbes later on abandoned the original meaning of wisdom in order to guarantee the actualization of wisdom, Machiavelli abandoned the original meaning of the good society or of the good life. What would happen to those natural inclinations of man or of the human soul whose demands simply transcend the lowered goal was of no concern to Machiavelli. He disregarded those inclinations. He limited his horizon in order to get results. And as for the power of chance, Fortuna appeared to him in the shape of a woman who can be forced by the right kind of men: chance can be conquered." To "disregard" is not unconsciously to "neglect," nor is a deliberate limiting of an horizon the same as being limited externally by an horizon. See, however, *TOM*, 291: "While Machiavelli is greatly concerned with Cyrus, he forgets Socrates." See also the conclusion of the Marsilius chapter of *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 294: "When antitheological passion induced a thinker to take the extreme step of questioning the supremacy of contemplation, political philosophy broke with the classical tradition, and especially with Aristotle, and took on an entirely new character. The thinker in question was Machiavelli."

roots—perhaps more successfully than did Heidegger, who lived at the end of the Machiavellian tradition and confronted its success.

None of this should be overlooked in Strauss's argument. But as Strauss makes clear, precisely the new Machiavellian political strategy—that which most obviously appears as a “break” with the ancients—is not a mere matter of improving things here and there, toward a sounder, more democratic and more secular politics.²¹ (Marsilius of Padua had after all attempted as much, without launching modernity, and without calling into question “the contemplative life.”) Making public what was known and even (according to Machiavelli) “covertly” taught by the “ancient writers” implies a new notion of the “public,” that is, of what can become fully acceptable as the whole of the noble and shameful, the praiseworthy and blameworthy. Strauss frequently speaks indeed of Machiavelli's references to “knowledge of nature” and the nature of man or of new modes and orders that are “in accordance with nature” (e.g., *TOM*, 169, 180, 183 [“man's nature or original constitution”], 190, 191, 192), or of permanent “humors” (205). But the necessities of nature to which Machiavelli refers are understood to have come into being by chance.²² Or as Strauss also puts it, even if Machiavelli himself realizes that chance cannot be vanquished—since man could then become master of the universe (*TOM*, 222)—he does suggest that in the realm of political life, chance can and will be conquered,²³ and hence that nature as it is “given” is comparatively weak.²⁴ The human society to be constructed from seeing and

²¹ *TOM*, 271: “The modes and orders which Machiavelli proposes are not simply the sound modes and orders, but new modes and orders. It is of their essence that knowledge of them is not only not coeval with man but is related negatively to Christianity or is post-Christian. The new modes and orders are brought to light by reason analyzing data partly supplied by the Christian republic.”

²² *TOM*, 222: “Machiavelli indicates his fundamental disagreement with Aristotle's doctrine of the whole by substituting ‘chance’ (*caso*) for ‘nature’ in the only context in which he speaks of ‘the beginning of the world.’...By substituting chance for nature when mentioning ‘the beginning of the world,’ Machiavelli indicates that he has abandoned the teleological understanding of nature and natural necessity for the alternative understanding.”

²³ See also “WIPP,” 41: “Machiavelli consciously lowers the standards of social action. His lowering of the standards is meant to lead to a higher probability of actualization of that scheme which is constructed in accordance with the lowered standards. Thus, the dependence on chance is reduced: chance will be conquered.”

²⁴ “WIPP,” 42: “Just as man is not by nature directed toward virtue, he is not by nature directed toward society. By nature man is radically selfish. Yet while men are by nature selfish, and nothing but selfish, hence bad, they can become social, public spirited, or good. This transformation requires compulsion. The success of this compulsion is due to the fact that man is amazingly malleable: much more so than had hitherto been thought. For if man is not by nature ordered toward virtue or perfection, if there is no natural end of man, man can set for himself almost any end he desires: man is almost infinitely malleable. The power of man is much greater, and the power of nature and chance is correspondingly much smaller, than the ancients thought.” And see *TOM*, 253: “Only he subjugates

manipulating the “roots” of human conduct—constructed by an army of followers, including not only political practitioners but theoretical men, a future cadre of officers (*TOM*, 297)—is not itself “natural” in the sense of being in accord with “inclinations.”²⁵ Machiavelli’s project of teaching the future conspirators requires “enlightenment” of them about the fundamental terror and the need for founding of institutions based on compelling self-interest, and even a certain enlightening of the many about this. If the “extreme case,” the greatest founders of the past, had terrorized their followers by scaring the old gods out of them and replacing them with new gods, Machiavelli, the new kind of prophet, aims to replace the old God with institutions based on a teaching about (nonteleological) nature. And this requires seeing man, as Strauss eventually says, as “infinitely malleable,” and his “brain” as capable of introducing “form” for obedience.²⁶ Machiavelli follows the great political founders in impressing his “form” into the “matter” of Livy, or Livy’s Rome supplies the “data” for him²⁷—his Tacitus is a “creation” (*TOM*, 165; cf. 148)—allowing him to anticipate the elimination, through his resultant teaching and its implementation, of the “chance” character of Rome’s success, or to anticipate and show the way to the rational replication of what otherwise appears to be the “miracle” of Rome.²⁸ To guarantee the right social order,

chance or is master of his fate who has discovered the fundamental necessities governing human life and therewith also the necessity of chance and the range of chance. Man is then subject to nature and necessity in such a way that by virtue of nature’s gift of ‘brain’ and through knowledge of nature and necessity he is enabled to use necessity and to transform matter.”

²⁵ See Leo Strauss, “Walker’s Machiavelli,” *Review of Metaphysics* 6, no. 3 (1953): 444: “Since political virtue is closer to the root, to ‘Calliclean’ virtue, than is moral virtue, it has *verita effettuale*: ‘political virtue’ designates the sum of habits which are required for maintaining a free and glorious society. Only if one has realized the precarious character of political virtue, i.e. the ‘unnatural’ character of a free society, can one devise the proper means for establishing and preserving a free society and the virtue belonging to it.”

²⁶ See *TOM*, 268: “the almost infinite malleability of ‘matter’ and the almost infinite power of ‘brain,’” with 297: “The scheme of a good society which it projects is therefore in principle likely to be actualized by men’s efforts or its actualization depends much less on chance than does the classical ‘utopia’: chance is to be conquered, not by abandoning the passionate concern with the goods of chance and the goods of the body but through giving free reign to it. The good society in the new sense is possible always and everywhere since men of sufficient brain can transform the most corrupt people, the most corrupt matter, into an incorrupt one by the judicious application of the necessary force. Since man is not by nature ordered toward fixed ends, he is as it were infinitely malleable.” See also “WIPP,” 43: “The shift from formation of character to the trust in institutions is the characteristic corollary of the belief in the almost infinite malleability of man.”

²⁷ *TOM*, 171: “The new modes and orders are brought to light by reason analyzing data partly supplied by the Christian republic.”

²⁸ See *TOM*, 116: “The ancient Roman polity was a work of chance, if of chance often prudently used; the ancient Romans discovered their modes and orders absent-mindedly or by accident, and they clung to them out of reverence for the ancestral. Machiavelli, however, achieves for the first time the

Machiavelli analyzes the “chance” success of Rome and impresses his “form” on the “matter” supplied by Livy and his “form” into the “corrupt matter” of the Christian republics (*TOM*, 170; cf. 222). The “form” to be introduced is “discovered or invented” through knowledge of the “roots” of human greatness, of freedom, and of obedience, and through knowledge of the hitherto successful “unarmed prophecy” of Christianity. It is meant to solve the political problem, to make it automatic through institutions and (eventually) also economics. As Strauss puts it, the man equipped with Machiavellian teaching brings order, self-consciously manmade order, to chaos.²⁹

It is for this reason, it seems to me, that Strauss speaks of and stresses the role of “propaganda” that Machiavelli took over from the religion of the unarmed prophet as “enlightenment.”³⁰ Unprotected man, man who needs to construct his own order, must be reminded of, terrified by, the original chaos, if he is to become “good” (*TOM*, 167, 183, 279)—by what becomes in Hobbes the “state of nature” doctrine. Civilizational “progress” away from this state, by the accumulation of strictly human “power” and institutions with teeth in them, becomes the new “orientation.” As the founder of enlightenment, Machiavelli sought to replace—with a new *doctrine* of a disordered, terrifying universe—the doctrine of Love, with a “new decalogue” based on the need to use necessities harsh and mild, in enlightened institutions and (eventually, for his army of successors) “economics,” or the securing of property through acquisition and technological innovation. “Economism is Machiavellianism come of age” (“WIPP,” 49). The gifts of technology thus offer a substitute for the rhetoric of classical political philosophy, a rhetoric that had employed various teleological myths about the demiurge and so forth in its political

anatomy of the Roman republic, and thus understands thoroughly the virtues and the vices of that republic.” See also *TOM*, 267: “Hence, the transformation of any corruption into incorruption or of any principality into a republic, and in particular the emergence of Roman freedom, seems to be a miracle.” See also *TOM*, 268.

²⁹ Leo Strauss, “Natural Right, Lecture to be delivered on January 19, 1946 in the General Seminar and in February 1946 in Annapolis” (Patard, 400–402):

The modern concept of the state of nature was decisively prepared by Machiavelli. Apparently, Machiavelli was still more convinced than were the classics, of the power of chance: he does not tire of speaking of fortuna. Yet, he understands by chance no longer exclusively something essentially exempt from any human control, but also something which may not merely be used, but actually be mastered. To master chance, is something much greater than to make use of chance, greater even than to make the best use of chance. Accordingly, for Machiavelli the great statesman is no longer in the best case a man who establishes, under favorable circumstances, the best political order, but the man who establishes any political order thanks to his mastering of chance. For this reason, as well as for his distrust of the utopianism of the classics, his chief concern is with the establishment of political order as such, i.e. of efficient government regardless of its level. For this purpose he has to go back behind every established order, and to understand how, or by means of what human qualities, the great man can produce order out of chaos.

³⁰ *TOM*, 172–73 and 297–98; and “WIPP,” 45–46.

teaching. As Strauss puts it in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, “By supplying all men with the goods which they desire, by being the obvious benefactress of all men, philosophy (or science) ceases to be suspect or alien. It ceases to be in need of rhetoric, except insofar as the goods which it procures must still be advertised in order to be sold; for men cannot desire what they do not know” (*TOM*, 296). In a similar statement made in his 1957 course on Plato’s *Gorgias*, Strauss even uses the shorthand “technology” to describe this change: “In a word: The modern substitute for that public rhetoric which Plato seeks is technology based on science. That bridges the gulf between philosophy and the non-philosophers, a kind of speechless conviction of all people that philosophy or science is salutary. We can say that technology is public rhetoric of modern times.”³¹

Whereas Aristotle had warned that innovation in the arts and thence to political matters is not, as is (progressive) innovation in science, salutary, Machiavelli, according to Strauss, presents the political leader as like a smith with a hammer: “Aristotle did not see that the relation of the founder to his human matter is not fundamentally different from the relation of a smith to his iron or his inanimate matter: Aristotle did not realize to what extent man is malleable, and in particular malleable by man” (*TOM*, 253). Hobbes’s speaking of man as the corrupt but transformable “matter” follows directly from this. And it accords with this that in the concluding section of *TOM* Strauss does not fail to make two explicit references, as he had in the Walgreen lectures, to “technology” (*TOM*, 298, 299).

³¹ “If the end of philosophy will be not simply to know the truth, but by knowing the truth to contribute to the relief of man’s estate, as Bacon said, to the increase of man’s power over non-human things, as Hobbes thought, or to contribute to comfortable self-preservation, as Locke meant it—in other words, if the end of philosophy will be to be in agreement with the desire to have more, philosophy will become immensely popular. The demos will not merely be the recipient of scientific information, more or less superficial or unsubstantial, the demos will be, as it were, the customers of the merchandise supplied by philosophy or science; from which merchandise they would derive substantial enjoyment. In a word: The modern substitute for that public rhetoric which Plato seeks is technology based on science. That bridges the gulf between philosophy and the non-philosophers, a kind of speechless conviction of all people that philosophy or science is [salutary]. We can say that technology is [the] public rhetoric of modern times. Even without advertising. . . . The problem which we have here to consider is not merely the A-bomb or the population bomb, as the enormous increase in the birthrate was called, but this new kind of philosophy or science which was made for the relief of man’s estate leads to a new kind of political philosophy or social science in which relativism, as it is called, reigns supreme. The highest authority becomes science in this modern world, and science empowers every choice of ends by its inability to pronounce any ends” (Leo Strauss, “Plato’s *Gorgias* (1957), A course offered in the winter quarter, 1957 Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago,” edited and with an introduction by Devin Stauffer, p. 130, available at <https://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/gorgias-winter-1957/>).

It is true that just as Strauss's evidence for the theoretical life in Machiavelli is assisted by looking backward to Machiavelli's classical predecessors, his evidence for the prototechnological is gained by looking forward to his modern successors. But Strauss stresses the resultant break, effected by Machiavelli's "teaching," with the former and the continuity with the latter. If the change effected by Machiavelli can be understood as an attempt to replace the conventional (teleological) understanding of political or social life with the "natural" understanding, this requires a transformation of the people, of "corrupt matter." And this project stands in theoretical need of the new, nonteleological science. And if for Machiavelli the initiative in knowing can still appear to be traceable to a certain necessity of nature and not to man's construction, modern philosophy and science, which places the initiative with man, is in "the spirit of Machiavelli," as Strauss puts it in "Three Waves of Modernity." "Man as the potential conqueror of nature stands outside of nature" (*City and Man*, 46), and Machiavelli is the first philosopher implicitly to require an "Archimedean point outside of nature."³² Machiavelli "achieves the decisive turn toward that notion of philosophy according to which its purpose is to relieve man's estate or to increase man's power or to guide man toward the rational society, the bond and the end of which is enlightened self-interest or the comfortable self-preservation of each of its members. The cave becomes 'the substance'" (*TOM*, 296). To be sure, Strauss does not present this as being as "clear" as Machiavelli's attempt to bring about the right social order through the conquest of chance, but he does invite us to see it as present. He suggests that perhaps the best way to understand this matter is that "philosophy is undergoing a change."³³ The self-admiration and serene resignation of the classical philosopher begins to become philosophy understood

³² *TOM*, 297:

Since man is not by nature ordered toward goodness, or since men can become good and remain good only through compulsion, civilization or the activity which makes men good is man's revolt against nature; the human in man is implicitly understood to reside in an Archimedean point outside of nature.... The discovery of the Archimedean point outside of everything given, or the discovery of a radical freedom, promises the conquest of everything given and thus destroys the natural basis of the radical distinction between philosophers and non-philosophers.

Compare *NRH*, 201 (on Hobbes): "But the very fact that the universe is unintelligible permits reason to rest satisfied with its free constructs, to establish through its constructs an Archimedean basis of operations, and to anticipate an unlimited progress in its conquest of nature."

³³ That Strauss extends this same modern thinking to Heidegger and his existentialist students, in their attempt to restore individual responsibility within the constraints of History, is suggested by the fact that Strauss points to the Baconian single (and "anthropocentric") science of man in his critique of Kurt Riezler's essay "Man's Science of Man," published in *Social Research* 12, no. 4 (Nov. 1945): 481–505. Strauss's essay was published by José Colen and Svetozar Minkov in *Review of Politics* 76, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 619–33.

as the enlightening handmaiden of civilizational progress. (It ceases to be, in Bacon's contemptuous word, "barren.")

All of Strauss's comprehensive statements about modernity accord with this,³⁴ and always, after the mid 1940s, attribute the origin of modernity to Machiavelli and link his thought to the Baconian/Cartesian end of conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate, becoming masters and owners of nature. Even Machiavelli's supple and enchanting appeal to youth, to the lovers of glory, became a casualty of the attempt to carry out his project, when Hobbes reduced human activity to the desire for "power" and thereby revealed the Machiavellian version of the desire for glory to be no more than a self-forgetting "vanity," a misguided version of the desire for self-preservation. The Lockean reduction of this desire to its most effectual means, property, or to acquisition—to the bourgeois life—Strauss presents as the maturation of the Machiavellian principle. And the society rationally devoted to acquisition is one that is driven by technology, by the encouragement of patents and copyrights that will advance the "arts and sciences" as Locke understands them. In Strauss's presentation the Rousseauian corrective of the Lockean society likewise aims, through the doctrine of the general will, to eliminate transcendent appeals, a "horizontal" notion of justice that takes the place of the appeal to natural law and is to be automatically effective. Strauss even recognizes the teaching of German political idealism along the same lines: the exalted right social order is brought about through selfish activity: "The 'idealistic' philosophy of freedom supplements and ennobles the 'materialistic' philosophy which it presupposes in the very act of negating it" (*TOM*, 297).³⁵ The youth who remain unalienated from the longing for eternity, and the prospect of "genuine sacrifice" that corresponds to that longing, eventually came to be repulsed by the full fruits of the Machiavellian project. In our present situation Strauss points them, *sine ire et studio*, to natural political reasoning of a subpolitical aristocracy within democracy and, for a few among them, a recovery of the original life of philosophy.

³⁴ See, for example, "Progress or Return?," 97–99, esp. 98: "To mention only one point, perhaps the most massive one, the idea of progress was bound up with the notion of the conquest of nature, of man making himself the master and owner of nature for the purpose of relieving man's estate. The means for that goal was a new science. We all know of the enormous successes of the new science and of the technology which is based on it, and we all can witness the enormous increase of man's power."

³⁵ See also "WIPP," 52–54, esp. 54: "Philosophy of history shows the essential necessity of the actualization of the right order. There is no chance in the decisive respect, i.e., the same realistic tendency which led to the lowering of the standards in the first wave led to philosophy of history in the second wave."

Strauss in other words does not move in the direction of *distinguishing* Machiavellian conquest of chance from Baconian/Cartesian/Hobbesian conquest of nature, but rather to indicating how the one gives rise to the other. So he can conclude “WIPP,” for example, with the following statement: “Modern thought [that is, the thought beginning with Machiavelli] reaches its culmination, its highest self-consciousness, in the most radical historicism, i.e., in explicitly condemning to oblivion the notion of eternity. For oblivion of eternity, or, in other words, estrangement from man’s deepest desire and therewith from the primary issues, is the price which modern man had to pay, from the very beginning, for attempting to be absolutely sovereign, to become the master and owner of nature, *to conquer chance*.”³⁶ And as the mention of “radical historicism” indicates, this statement also has a bearing on Stauffer’s question concerning Strauss, Heidegger, and technology. It suggests that for all of his efforts to be released from and to release all of us from technology, Heidegger remained in its grip—that he accepts, as Strauss indicates elsewhere, “the modern premises.”³⁷

None of this is to deny that Stauffer has good reason to speak of Strauss’s sympathy with Machiavelli’s democratizing project. Among other things, Strauss speaks of Machiavelli as leading “that greatest of all youth movements: modern philosophy,” to which Strauss invites us to be the “moved witnesses,”³⁸ and which he does his best to present to us in its moving origin in Machiavelli—in its opposition to the pious cruelty and suppression of freedom that would have been condemned by the ancients, too, as inhumane. But Strauss invites us also to assess this youth movement now in its maturity

³⁶ “WIPP,” 55, emphasis added. The statement might appear to be at odds with Strauss’s contrast, on 49, between Machiavelli’s appeal to “glory” and Hobbes’s appeal to “power”: “Far from being the goal of a lofty or demonic longing, [power] is required by, or the expression of, a cold objective necessity. Power is morally neutral. Or, what is the same thing, it is ambiguous if of concealed ambiguity. Power, and the concern with power lack the direct human appeal of glory and the concern with glory. It emerges through an estrangement from man’s primary motivation. It has an air of senility.” But since, as Strauss goes on to say, in Hobbes *Machiavellian* “glory” is “deflated” by revealing what it is, that is, “mere, unsubstantial, ridiculous, petty vanity,” the “estrangement” in question begins, it is implied, with Machiavelli.

³⁷ See Leo Strauss, “The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy,” in *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 27. See also “Notes for Philosophy and Law,” under “[Notes for the Project of Philosophy and the Law II (1946)]” in Patard, 769: “the ‘historical’ point of view replaces the ‘sovereignty’ of individual by the sovereignty of the group—it thus deprives the individual of the ultimate responsibility—‘existentialism’ attempts to restore that absolute responsibility of the individual while recognizing his radical *Gebundenheit*.”

³⁸ *TOM*, 127: “In studying the *Discourses* we become the witnesses, and we cannot help becoming the moved witnesses, of the birth of that greatest of all youth movements: modern philosophy, a phenomenon which we know through seeing, as distinguished from reading, only in its decay, its state of depravation and its dotage.” See also “WIPP.”

and indeed its dotage, after it has achieved its goal of destroying Christendom or (ultimately) of disenchanting the world.³⁹ The assessment is not positive: the strategy has led to the dehumanization of man and the obscuring of the original meaning of philosophy and of political philosophy. The “prudence” of Machiavelli, which Machiavelli (according to Strauss) presents as *necessitating* the novel attempt, through his writings, to conquer chance, was in the end not so prudent. This helps to explain why Strauss, who is ever warning his readers against attributing subphilosophic motives to philosophers, takes the surprising step of twice saying in published statements that Machiavelli was motivated by antitheological ire or passion.⁴⁰ The statements indicate the depth of Machiavelli’s ambition—as does the statement about Machiavelli’s spiritual “war to the finish”⁴¹ against Christianity—but also a limitation on the clarity of Machiavelli’s vision or plan, a giving in to a passion. Not only does the glorious life of self-interested political greatness, by which Machiavelli entices the youth, turn into Hobbes’s shivering man seeking security and eventually into Locke’s self-interested economic man, later contemned by (German) youth, but it has also a long-range effect on philosophy. In securing the authority of philosophy by making it useful to the people, Machiavelli made philosophy or science vulnerable to being misunderstood as having as its goal the utility of the people or utility (power) simply. Its authority depended on its beneficial character, in manifestly negating the mistakes of the imaginative responses to our exposedness or unprotectedness, through the teaching of princes. If the ancients’ political defense of philosophy required a certain distortion of philosophy, one that became misunderstood as the essence of philosophy, the defense of it begun by Machiavelli meets a worse fate. For there is this difference: philosophy as it is, knowing because knowledge is our greatest good—“the one thing needful”—is *visible* in the doctrines of classical and medieval political philosophy. Perhaps above all, the new science, the “successful” part of the new philosophy that becomes authoritative for it, eventually becomes, with the introduction of non-Euclidean geometry into the new mathematical physics,⁴² manifestly value-free, so that the intended defense falls apart. Philosophy or the life of science comes to be understood

³⁹ *TOM*, 298: “The necessity which spurred on Machiavelli and his great successors [that is, the overthrow of Christianity or elimination of “The Kingdom of Darkness”—*TOM*, 231] spent itself some time ago. What remains of their effort no longer possesses the evidence which it possessed while their adversary was powerful; it must now be judged entirely on its intrinsic merits.”

⁴⁰ “WIPP,” 44; “Marsilius of Padua,” 294.

⁴¹ “WIPP,” 46. Cf. *TOM*, 171.

⁴² See “Progress or Return?,” 99–100, and *NRH*, 79.

as no different in principle from—no more or less natural than, or no better than—other ways of life, and, indeed, inferior to other ways with regard to “life”—a mistake traced by Nietzsche and Heidegger to Socratic “optimism.” Moreover, as it seems to me, Strauss indicates a fundamental flaw in Machiavelli’s account of “the human things,” his elevation of the extreme case of the founder, and in his presentation of acquisition as necessitated and praised: Machiavelli does not take justice seriously; “wisdom is not a great theme for Machiavelli because justice is not a great theme for him” (*TOM*, 295). In particular, “sacrifice” is presented narrowly and misleadingly as praised in the people’s assessment of the founder merely as a sacrifice of his ease equal to that of moral virtue.⁴³ In any event, Strauss invites us now to return both to political philosophy as originally understood and to the political reasoning that can both support it and sustain a healthy politics.

Finally, as for Machiavelli not being for Strauss, as Stauffer notes, a “principled” proponent of democracy, this is quite true. As Strauss notes, Machiavelli offers his counsels to both potential tyrants and to friends of republics; his favoring of republics is caused by their greater freedom of thought and speech and hence by their having a place to “reason about everything” that belongs to the philosophic life (*TOM*, 126–27). And since the prospect of ruling in such a way as to *completely* replace fear of God by fear of man is available in principalities but not in republics, Strauss can even say that “Machiavelli may be said to foreshadow the extreme form of ‘enlightened despotism’” that marked the first political phase of the enlightenment (*TOM*, 227). I will add that according to Strauss, neither were later modern thinkers, Spinoza and Rousseau—the founders of “democratic theory proper” (*TOM*, 294)—principled proponents of democracy, if by this is meant that they themselves saw its advantage through a different lens than Machiavelli’s. Spinoza, for example, who both directly and through his influence on Rousseau and hence on Kant, “became responsible for that version of modern republicanism which takes its bearings by the dignity of every man rather than by the narrowly conceived interest of every man,”⁴⁴ did so as a means to

⁴³ *TOM*, 269: “Goodness at acquiring is praised because it is rare, difficult to practice, and salutary to its possessor; it requires at least as much toil and sacrifice of ease as does moral virtue itself.”

⁴⁴ See Leo Strauss, Preface to *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 15: “Directly and through his influence on Rousseau, who gave the decisive impulse to Kant, Spinoza became responsible for that version of modern republicanism which takes its bearings by the dignity of every man rather than by the narrowly conceived interest of every man. Spinoza’s political teaching starts from a natural right of every human being as the source of all possible duties. Hence it is free from that sternness and austerity which classical political philosophy shares with ancient law—a sternness which Aristotle expressed classically by saying that what the law does

securing the “freedom to philosophize” in a liberal democracy, the freedom to engage in the theoretical life⁴⁵ which, after the establishment of modern science, he had attempted to restore in a manner that was compatible with the new natural science.⁴⁶ And like Bacon, Spinoza acknowledged his debt to Machiavelli’s critique of imaginary republics and principalities—as Strauss had noticed early but the significance of which he had failed to see before the 1940s. This is to say nothing of the fact that Spinoza can be understood to lift “Machiavellianism to theological heights” (Preface to *SCR*, 18).

I suspect that none of this is news to Stauffer, and it may not convince him, but I am grateful to him for comments that have compelled me to state more fully my claim that Strauss sees the modern “project” as inherently technological and Machiavelli as having, through his “teaching,” launched that project. I know that Stauffer is engaged in a careful study of Strauss’s Machiavelli, and that, like everything he writes, it will be outstanding, and will offer helpful correctives to my argument, to which I look forward.

not command it forbids. Hence Spinoza is free from the classical aversion to commercialism; he rejects the traditional demand for sumptuary laws. Generally speaking, his polity gives the passions much greater freedom and correspondingly counts much less on the power of reason than the polity of the classics. Whereas for the classics the life of passion is a life against nature, for Spinoza everything that is is natural.”

⁴⁵ See Preface to *SCR*, 19–21, esp. 21: “freedom of philosophy requires, or seems to require, a liberal state.”

⁴⁶ See Preface to *SCR*, 15–16: “Spinoza restored the dignity of speculation on the basis of modern philosophy or science, of a new understanding of nature. . . . For Spinoza there are no natural ends and hence in particular there is no end natural to man. He is therefore compelled to give a novel account of man’s end (the life devoted to contemplation): man’s end is not natural, but rational, the result of man’s figuring it out, of man’s ‘forming an idea of man, as of a model of human nature.’ He thus decisively prepares the modern notion of the “ideal” as a work of the human mind or as a human project, as distinguished from an end imposed on man by nature.” See also 29: Spinoza’s philosophic system as it appears in his *Ethics* aims to show man “theoretically and practically as the master of the world and the master of his life; the merely given world must be replaced by the world created by man theoretically and practically.”