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Harvey C. Mansfield. *Machiavelli's Virtue.* Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996. xvi + 371 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-50368-4.

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The author, a philosophical interpreter of political thought, has collected his miscellaneous papers on Machiavelli; the contents of the volume, ranging from book prefaces to journal articles, date from the 1960s to the present. His own immediate forerunner, to whom he frequently acknowledges his debt, is Leo Strauss, the author of *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958). The reader, on the other hand, eventually sees that Harvey Mansfield is in fact attempting, in style and content, to write like Niccolo Machiavelli himself–almost to become Niccolo Machiavelli. As a translator of Machiavelli he has a close familiarity with the original texts and with a wide range of literature in Italian as well as in other languages, but he has little interest in erudition, and it is possible once or twice to catch him (like Machiavelli) being careless about precision and detail: he can refer to "Emperor Charles I" (p. 166) when he means Charles I of Anjou, king of Naples, making the reader wonder whether he really has a very secure grasp of elementary things like ruler chronologies; and Bernardo Rucellai is successively described as the "uncle" (p. 196) and "grandfather" (p. 203, correctly) of the younger Cosimo Rucellai.

One of the conceits of the book is that plain truths do not exist, or perhaps that truths evanesce if spoken plainly, so that a Machiavellian author must be deliberately obscure. Nevertheless I will try, for the purposes of this brief notice, to reduce some of Mansfield's leading ideas to simple statements in the following parapraph.

Machiavelli really does aim to undermine the influence of Christianity on European life, as he does the influence of all systems of transcendental belief on the lives of humans on earth–for he was not really a patriot of Florence, or of Italy, but of humanity. It was Christianity that created the difference between the parties of ancient Rome, whose conflict made the republic strong, and the parties of modern Florence, whose conflict makes Florence impotent. The *Discorsi* and *Il Principe* were always intended by their author to form an integrated body of doctrine, so that there is no real discrepancy or opposition between them, and to quibble about the relative dates of composition is a waste of time. Not only does Machiavelli abandon the classical description of different political constitutions, but even the distinction between republics and principalities with which *Il Principe* begins is not consequential, whereas the important distinction is that between the humor of princes (the men with a drive to dominate and win glory, a class present in any republic or principality) and the humor of the people (who desire only ease and freedom from domination). Machiavelli is the founding thinker of modernity.

All of these ideas are forcefully and, to me, convincingly argued. There is a wealth of pertinent analysis of Machiavelli's thinking about Rome and the other ancient states, such as Sparta, with which he compared Rome, in chapters such as number 3, "Burke and Machiavelli on principles in politics" (ed. pr. 1967), and number 10, "Machiavelli's new regime" (ed. pr. 1970). But some of Mansfield's other ideas, such as those I synthesize in the following paragraph, struck me as exorbitant.

Machiavelli is really a character in his own writings. In one sense he is an unarmed prophet, like the founder and the periodic revivers of Christianity who repelled and fascinated him. Like them, he too must exercise his will to rule indirectly, as the author of his books. In another sense, he is a prince and a master conspirator, plotting the structure of human politics in the future by advising, and thus in a sense mastering, the princes of the future. In order that they shall have to struggle to fulfill his plan for them, he has left his writings both cryptic and incomplete.

Of the writings devoted to the *Istorie Fiorentine*, the most interesting and challenging is chapter 6, "Party and sect in Machiavelli's Florentine Histories" (ed. pr. 1972), but this is also the chapter in which Mansfield's idiosyncrasy attains its limit. He believes that in the proem, and in chapters 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, and 8.1, Machiavelli is creating an elaborate anti-Christian conspiracy, a puzzle to be worked out by a few readers only. Mansfield, in

order not to give away the game, also contorts his exposition of Machiavelli's puzzle, and the reader soon starts to feel that she has been transported into the world of *Il Pendolo di Foucault.* There is too much rapid and imprecise summary of the contents of the *Istorie Fiorentine* with no reference to the actual history of the '200, '300, and '400, and too many flights of fancy like the one based on Machiavelli's judgment of the retroactive measures taken against putative Ghibellines in 1358, and by extension of all retroactively punitive legislation: "no si puo fare legge per una repubblica piu dannosa che quella che riguarda assai tempo indietro" (3.3). Mansfield "translates" this to mean: "The most damaging law might be the one that looks back the longest time; and that would be the law of obedience to God, by which all men are sinners because they are involved in original sin" (p. 167).

Arguments of that kind might suit the world of "theoretical" literary studies, but they won't do for historians, or not for this historian anyway. For contrast I turned to a book full of the kind of learning and academic effort, in her case the comparison between Machiavelli and his literary sources, that Mansfield has no time for, Anna Maria Cabrini's *Interpretazione e Stile in Machiavelli. Il Terzo Libro delle Istorie* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990). Perhaps I might conclude with a fantasy of my own: scholarship on Machiavelli is like the state as envisaged by Machiavelli, and Mansfield feels himself to be one of the princes, while Cabrini belongs to the *popolo.* But just as the princes and the *popolo* have to engage in opposition to one another for the dynamic health of the state, it is good that both kinds of scholarship should exist in rivalry, because one can learn more about Machiavelli by reading both than one could by reading either exclusively.

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