Machiavelli and the Discovery of Fact

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How is it possible to conceive the mastery of nature if nature consists of facts? Facts are indomitable, unwilling to be mastered; they are resistance itself. Resistance personified is “stubborn,” and so are facts. “Facts are stubborn things” (John Adams, 1788). “Plain matters of fact are terrible stubborn things” (Bernard Mandeville, 1732). The matter of fact is pure matter, without potentiality. One cannot ascend from a fact to its meaning, to what makes it intelligible. What makes a fact perceptible is not a sign of being, of the thing in itself, to which one can reason with the aid of imagination. A fact is not an imperfect version of something perfect. It is what it is, its reality equal to its appearance. So one must accept facts as given, as data, in contrast to works of the imagination.

Instead of perfecting facts one must isolate them. One must isolate the unintelligible—and here comes mastery—in order to liberate the intelligence to conceive. If one had to imagine things on the basis of perceptions, perfecting them, one would be limited, hampered, by having to take seriously the ordinary appearances of things in order to discover what they “mean,” i.e., what they imply. It would be hard to know which is true, the ordinary meaning that holds for most cases, lead falling faster than feathers, or the extraordinary meaning of the scientist, the two falling at the same rate in a vacuum produced in a laboratory. There would be a loose meaning of every perception for ordinary life and a strict meaning for the adepts. The adepts would spend their time telling ordinary folk that they are deluded without being able to guide them to an understanding offering greater
mastery over their lives. There would seem to be one “nature,” but viewed
differently by non-philosophers and philosophers, both trying to make it intelligible
as helpful to them but disagreeing as to which view is correct. Nature would always
be mixed up with meaning, that is, with convention, nurture, culture in such a way
that nature limits, hampers, prevents mastery over nature. All mastery would seem
to be guided by the nature men want to master.

So modern science tries to establish facts. Facts are data, given things, that
cannot be fiddled or monkeyed with. Nature consists of what is purely given,
“almost worthless material” (Locke), with no promises of anything better, no
guidance as to use, no inclinations to perfect attached to one’s perceptions. The
purpose of modern science is to see nature as pure fact as opposed to human wish,
and in this it reverts from the Socratic turn to human opinion back to the original
pre-Socratic distinction between nature and convention that also sought a
dichotomous distinction between the two, each untainted with the other. Now,
however, science has to deal with the deceitfulness of nature that makes ordinary
folk and philosophers who take them seriously want to follow, instead of master,
nature. Science must undertake a critique of ordinary perceptions together with a
critique, or more likely, a flat rejection without a critique, of Aristotle. Nature is not
just sitting there innocently, ready to be mastered; nature must be interrogated,
treated with what our time calls “enhanced interrogation techniques,” to speak
plainly even “tortured.”

Nature must be reduced to facts, and these not facts merely of ordinary
perception, but scientific facts, experimental facts. These prove to be facts you
never see, like a feather and a lump of lead falling at the same rate. These are facts invisible to the naked eye; the natural eye has to be aided by artificial aids, the microscope and the telescope. Science exists by looking at things you can’t ordinarily see. The visible is less real, less a “fact,” than the invisible; the real facts are of unbelievably large or unbelievably small size. To get past convention to find fact, one has to get past conventional vision—though isn’t that natural?—to arrive at the full notion of fact. For modern science, especially social science, nature is all or nothing. It is either entirely intelligible as a fact universally, which means without human intervention, or it is not at all intelligible. Is maternal instinct a fact of women’s psychology? It either has to be so universally and without variation, and spontaneously without conscious thought, that is, a determinate fact of life without fail, or it is not fact, because corrupted by human interpretation and choice. There is no “inclination,” no final cause, of being a mother that could be completed in various ways in different cultures, not universally and exactly but probably and “for the most part."

The establishment—it goes beyond mere recognition—of fact frees science from the inclinations and promises of previously so-called nature. It can develop its own imagination now guided by mastery, the use of theory to improve human art, science and technology, with the end to improve human life. Human life consists of suffering—Christianity was right about that—but it is suffering that can be relieved. Thus modern philosophy, the tutor of science in its youth, can be both empirical, to establish facts, and rational, to conceive theories or models in abstraction from facts. The models can make use of mathematics, a new mathematics newly abstracted
from facts, counting abstracted from things counted. Empiricism and rationalism, however apparently opposed, cooperate with one another: empiricism to liberate science from intelligible nature with its skepticism over the “natures” of things, rationalism to occupy and exploit the field left empty as a result.

Machiavelli begins this shift in modern science to fact. He shows us the original motive for making this change from perception as appearance to perception as fact. This was to oppose and then appropriate the enemy to human freedom in religious vision. The trouble with Socratic philosophy with its intelligible nature resting on perfected perceptions was that it could be taken over by religious vision. For modern science was not the only force seeking mastery over nature; this was also characteristic of religion, both pagan and Christian but especially the latter. When confronted with Plato’s idea of the good, ordinary people can be made to suppose that their good is what will make them secure in the future, immediate and far-off. They want to know what is going to happen to them. So they personify persons, gods or God, who secure “the good” for them, not merely in the minds of philosophers. This religion is an attempt to master nature, and Machiavelli shows that humans, using prudence and even “science” (Discourses on Livy 3: 39), can appropriate Christianity and use its methods against itself.

Machiavelli seems to be interested in politics and not in the science of nature. It would be much better to say that he approaches the science of nature through politics. His approach can be seen at its most explicit in the famous paragraph that begins chapter 15 of The Prince. From this start I will try to show, in brevissimo tempo, how he sets the state for the discovery of fact. That discovery, “fact” by name
in its modern sense, seems to have been made by Thomas Hobbes, as I shall add at
the end of the discussion of Machiavelli.

We can begin from Machiavelli the professor of necessity as opposed to the
professors of imaginary good. His appeal to necessity is designed overall to simplify
not just our politics and morality but our thinking in general. Necessity will give us
access to the truth without having to sort out dialectical disputes or to consult high-
minded rationalizations. Yet in “fact”—the word not quite invented but prepared by
Machiavelli—necessity is not so simple as it first appears. The last sentence of that
paragraph, Machiavelli’s clarion call to modern morality and modern politics, is as
follows: “Hence it is necessary for a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn
to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.” He
identifies his departure from “the orders of others” as moving to a new standard of
necessity, and he makes it emphatic by using “necessary” twice and in two different
meanings. The first is what one is compelled to do; the second is the standard for
choice, “according to” which one must act when one appears to have a choice.
When not compelled by necessity, it appears, one must choose it.¹ This double
meaning is the first item of complexity in necessity: that necessity is not always
compelling and does not in every case do away with choice.

Machiavelli gives a reason for adopting the focus of necessity in the exercise
of one’s choices: “A man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards

¹ See D 1. 1, 4-6; citations from Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy are to book, chapter
and paragraph, using the translation of Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov,
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Citations to The Prince are to chapter
and page in the translation of Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2nd ed., 1998), and those to the Florentine Histories in the translation of Laura
must come to ruin among so many who are not good” (P 15.61). This person could be a political scientist or philosopher like himself, and he immediately mentions the “many who have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth.” “A profession of good,” the standard Machiavelli departs from, represents a choice made regardless of necessity, even in defiance of necessity, as when one acts, and defends one’s action, by professing that it is good regardless of the sacrifice of one’s own well-being and the risk of coming to ruin. Making a sacrifice, taking a risk, is what is known as nobility, though Machiavelli does not mention it here. Machiavelli, to put it mildly, is no friend of the “gentlemen” (kaloik’agathoi, “the noble and good”) who are addressed by Plato and Aristotle. Also included in the category of those nobly resisting necessity might be Christian martyrs. Though it may well be true that noble examples are rare, they are impressive and are able to set the standard by which the gentlemen and ordinary people too judge others and themselves. Despite its focus on the noble few, this standard has made itself universal, encompassing all humans, by taking advantage of human admiration for the best. Machiavelli departs from this standard and creates a new one to replace it.

Now in the old standard, what is the reason for making a profession of good, rather than merely doing good?” Machiavelli implies that the profession is needed. Goodness does not stand on its own unaided; it needs the support of a profession that makes it possible or reasonable to attempt. If you are good, what is the guarantee that others, particularly the “many who are not good,” will make it reasonable to be good? Will the wicked not gladly proceed to take advantage of
you? You must therefore presuppose a good society, one not in the hands of rascals
and rogues, that will make it possible for you to be good without coming to ruin.
And the good society must be compatible with human nature, which too must good,
and then the goodness of human nature must be compatible with, or comforted by,
the goodness of non-human nature, the whole. For what can human goodness
accomplish on its own, so to speak, without nature’s cooperation? Nature must
contribute an environment in which good men can thrive, powerful inclinations
toward good in the human soul, and a regularity of motions and seasons permitting
good men to live in confidence and understanding rather than fear for survival in
blind ignorance.

So Machiavelli rightly extends the required reason behind doing good to a
“profession,” that is, an explanation of the contextual support, and that profession of
good must be “in all regards.” The reassurance that morality needs is a profession of
the whole, clearly a philosophical task. If Machiavelli is going to dispute the
profession of good that philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, the classic ones,
have provided, he will have to cover the same ground in order to show that he is
right and they are wrong. He will have to make a profession of necessity in all
regards counter to the profession of good in all regards.

Whereas Aristotle starts his *Nicomachean Ethics* from the existence and
practice of moral people, implying that morality exists, is viable, and a going concern
that one merely has to examine rather than create,\(^2\) Machiavelli begins this critical
passage with a critique of morality, denying that it is viable and asserting that it will

bring you to ruin. To ruin! Together with Christianity, he disagrees with Aristotle that morality exists and adopts the Christian view of the sinfulness of the world, but he seems to foreclose the redemption in the next world promised by Christianity. The redeemer he promises in *The Prince* is a worldly one for Italy (P 26.105). In *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* Machiavelli speaks of “the world” rather than of “this world,” which implies another world beyond this one.

Necessity, then, has the character of a presumption, rival to the presumption of the good. As a presumption, necessity is not a determination that in each case, one who chooses the good will inevitably come to ruin. With luck a good man might be safe from the many who are not good and prosperous to boot, but one cannot count on such luck. For the good man it is in a strong sense fitting (*conviene*) that he come to ruin, for holding the wrong presumption. He deserves it. Machiavelli does not expel fortune but he also does not suffer it. Prudence for him is not to take account of risk when necessary but rather to do so in principle, always avoiding evil by presuming that it will be encountered. Thus this passage anticipates his nearly explicit statement that one must do evil to the other fellow before he does it to you (D 1.52.1). You may not succeed, to be sure, because the contingency of things may go against you. Perhaps too the good person will not be punished for his goodness. But with the correct presumption you have a better chance.

The presumption of necessity is supported by the impending presence of ruin as the profession of good is not. Who wants to come to ruin? When confronting the stark face of necessity, almost everyone is easily persuaded, or,

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since persuasion may not be necessary, easily moved toward safety regardless of imaginative persuasions to do otherwise. If necessity is not apparent, it can be made so, and often with actions better than words. Its being apparent, or easy to make apparent, is part of the simplicity that gives it power and makes its truth “effectual.” Necessity has the spontaneity of animal nature behind it, whereas the good needs to be thought about and deliberated. So the presumption of necessity is less presumptuous than the presumption of good. “Nobility” is a delusion that depends on a life beyond life that does not exist; it is an imaginary form of self-preservation. Machiavelli will teach those who desire nobility how truly to attain it and assure it.

Here, speaking so emphatically of necessity, Machiavelli takes a long step in the direction of scientific determinism, but he does not go the whole way. By retaining the need for good fortune, he holds to human freedom and virtue in the management of fortune. For Machiavelli prudence seems to be the same as “shrewdness” (astuzia), not distinct from it as with Aristotle.4 Reason in practice, and so also in theory, is not on the side of goodness.

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4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1144a23-29. In *The Prince* astuteness is associated with greatness; in P 15.62 it is paired with honesty in the contrast of human “qualities,” and Severus (the model criminal founder of P 19.79, 82) is said to be a “very astute fox” as well as a “very fierce” lion. Prudence seems to be more public, less hidden, than astuteness (D 1.6.4; 1.41); in P 23.95, a prince is said to be “very prudent” who by chance might “submit himself to one alone who might govern him in everything, who is a very prudent man.” Machiavelli may consider himself very prudent not to allow himself to be considered, in his own case, very astute. But this does not amount to Aristotle’s distinction between prudence and cunning. One might say that prudence is the teaching of astuteness (see the “astuteness of Hercules” in D. 2.12.2). “Human astuteness and malignity” may or may not have a limit (D. 2.5.2).
Machiavelli shows his awareness of the need to go beyond morality in order to question it by speaking of a new sort of truth that will settle the dispute over morality, the “effectual truth” (verità effettuale). The effectual truth is opposed to the imagined truth stated in professions of goodness, and it is shown in effects. For example, Machiavelli shows near the beginning of the Discourses on Livy that the disputes between the nobles and the plebs in the Roman republic should not be condemned, as did writers under the influence of classical political science, including Livy, had done. This criticism was based on an imagined possible harmony between the two typical parties in every republic, but Machiavelli contends that in their effects the disputes were the cause of Rome’s becoming strong and free (D 4-6). The “effects” were the outcome in practice, as we would now say, in effect or in fact, of conflicting opinions that might be resolved on the level of imagined theory but in the world as it is would be resolved only as they made men act. In this case the superiority or nobility of the nobles was not deferred to by the plebs but understood as oppressive and opposed, and the result was a contentious republic that had the power to expand and the prudence to satisfy or at least to appease the people. In The Prince Machiavelli’s discussion of morality after announcing the idea of “effectual truth” explains that the various virtues, called “qualities” in Chapter 15, take effect in the ways in which they are “held” (tenuto) to be, not as they are. For example, liberality is what it will be held to be—its effectual truth—not what it is imagined to be (P 16.64). This sort of truth will later be known as empirical because it is based on “fact.” To the ancients, a fact was a that (hoti) to which one could point, but that comes and goes, and is not truth, which is
permanent. *Facta* (*erga* in Greek) were deeds as opposed to speeches, not truth as opposed to imagination, as for Machiavelli.\(^5\)

Machiavelli’s profession of necessity develops a context in which necessity will be understood and appreciated rather than ignored, set aside, or suppressed, as happens with professions of good. This context is the “world,” which he constantly invokes, together with the “worldly things” of which it is composed.\(^6\) The world rejects the invisible next world of Christian belief and theology, together with the intelligible world of classical rationalism. The world is visible, and consists of simple and mixed bodies, the simple bodies of nature and the mixed bodies of nature and human forming (D 2.5.2). There are no natural forms to be seen, only forms of human conception to be “introduced.”\(^7\) The prudence of a prince can put his form on the material of his principality (P 26.102), in the political deed that Machiavelli offers to describe human knowing. A prince knows what he is doing when he is introducing his “form,” which is making his presence, that is, his truth, effectual. Knowledge of the world is not distinct from acting upon it, for the world’s necessities, when understood, open the way for the prince's intervention into it.

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\(^6\) See especially references to “the whole world” in P 3.9, 19.81; D 3.11.2, cf. D 2.2.2 (the “honor of the world”). Also “knowing the world,” P 18.70; D 3.31.3 and not knowing it, D 1.38.3, 3.31.3. And “worldly things,” D DL.3.

\(^7\) Forms are imposed on matter rather than recognized in it; see P 6.23, 26.102, 104. See also Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), 337n118.
The neutrality of “worldly things,” which are permanent though not intelligible, permits and promotes the enterprises of princes and captains.

The world is a “whole” on its own, as the world of sense. It is not a whole with parts, as it is composed of unintelligible “things” that behave according to necessity. Necessity is divided into necessities, especially in regard to humans, where each human being has his own necessity for which he must exercise his own arms. We are all set against one another in a manner later to be formalized in Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature. But there are also groupings of men very relevant to politics, particularly the division of “humor” between those who desire to command other men and those who desire not to be commanded. ⑧ A humor is a medical term that refers to exhalations arising from the body, not the soul, hence indicating a typical necessity rather than a typical choice. Conflict between the two parties of nobles and plebs in the Roman republic made it “free” as well as strong. It was indeed “the first cause” of keeping it free (D 1.4.1). Freedom can be found in both the princely and the popular humor—as the freedom to command for princes, ultimately “to be alone” at the top, and as the freedom to oppose or resist being commanded for the people. Each humor, each aspect of freedom, is felt as a necessity that determines behavior rather than a moral choice that guides it.

If the world can be known, and knowledge is of permanent things, does that mean that the world is eternal? This would place Machiavelli in the ambit of Aristotle, for whom the world of joined matter and form is eternal since the natural forms are eternal. But Machiavelli seems to deny that the forms of nature are

  ⑧ P 9.39; D 1.4.1, 1.5.2, 1.7.1; FH 3.1.
eternal; rather, there are certain patterns of behavior such as the princely and popular humors. The “simple and mixed bodies” he speaks of, a division of bodies, would appear to signify materialism, suggesting a source in Lucretius, whose poem Machiavelli himself copied by hand. But Lucretius said that the world is not eternal; it is merely a temporary, chance formation of atoms, which are alone eternal. Machiavelli is serious about politics and the knowledge of politics, as Lucretius is not. Perhaps the eternity of the world, inferred so as to make it knowable to himself and later Machiavellians, was accepted by him simply because it was opposed to the creation of the world asserted in Christianity. He was with Aristotle so that the world could be known, and with Lucretius so that he could deny intelligible natures in the world.

Necessity, for Machiavelli, is expressed in the world of sense. Perhaps it is not necessarily expressed there, but Machiavelli inflates necessity beyond its normal confines. In that world ruin for the body is graver than perfection or salvation for the soul, which does not exist in it. Knowing that world requires learning how not to be good among the many who are not good. This means adopting the goal and practices of acquiring. “And truly it is a very natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire....” (P 3.14) Moral condemnation of it is effectual only when one attempts to acquire and fails. One might believe, and Machiavelli at first says, that an hereditary prince, who hardly disturbs the people he rules, is a “natural prince” because he has “less cause and less necessity to offend” (P 2.7). But in view of the natural and ordinary necessity to acquire, Machiavelli corrects his view of the natural prince; it is not the hereditary prince but the new prince. On his arrival in power, the new
prince cannot help offending both his enemies whom he has displaced and his friends whom he may disappoint (P. 3.8; cf. D 1.7.2). The necessity to acquire applies to the hereditary prince as well, because he must take care to stay ahead of those whose desire to acquire will operate against him. Anticipation becomes the rule of those who hold an acquisition as much as those who seek to gain one (D 1.6.4, 1.52.2). The fear of losing generates the same ambition as the desire to acquire, but to greater effect since the holder of the state has greater means (D 1.5.2).

How new must the new prince be? How far does the necessity to acquire extend? It seems at first that the new prince must depend on his “opportunity” to acquire, for example that Moses found the people of Israel oppressed by the Egyptians (P 6.23). But on further reflection we are told that a prince can build his own “foundations” so as to make his own opportunity (P 6.25, 7.27, 32). Those foundations might consist of the customs and opinions of his time as enshrined in religion, particularly the Christianity Machiavelli found in his own time, which thought so little of the “honor of the world” that he thought necessary to defend (D 2.2.2). A prince would then have to change the thinking of his people, creating for them a new “sect” and becoming himself the “prophet” of that sect. The best way to do this might be not to create a new sect but to take the existing sect and transform

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9 The word “sect” (setta) occurs once in The Prince and 20 times in the Discourses, 7 times in one chapter, D 2.5. On the prince as prophet see P 6.28; and for the distinction between armed and unarmed prophets, we are told that a prince can become armed if he knows the “art of war,” P 14.58, together with P 13.56 on David and Goliath.
it to one’s own purpose. This is what Machiavelli did to Christianity, as he shows by citing the example of David and Goliath in Chapter 13 of *The Prince* (P 13.56).

The necessity to acquire compels one to use force and fraud, especially fraud. Those who rise “from small beginnings to sublime ranks,” and Machiavelli cites his exemplar the Romans, always find it necessary to use fraud and are “the less worthy of reproach the more it is covert” (P 7.32; D 2.13.2). Obviously they cannot use “open force” at first, when they are weak, but they could excuse themselves from blame for using fraud by remembering that the power they displace also rose to its height by the same means. And as with the necessity to acquire in order to maintain, so with the necessity for fraud: a powerful prince needs to use fraud to protect himself against the fraud that will be used against him. Thus, because acquiring means acquiring from others, or in competition with others, secrecy becomes essential to politics. When anticipation is the rule, one cannot afford to let others, that is, one’s enemies, know what is being planned against them. The characteristic mode of behavior becomes conspiracy, not only in politics but in all society influenced by politics, including friendship. It is a “very wise thing” to live a life of conspiracy, and a necessity that must be judged particularly by the few who might prefer the contemplative life.

That religion is a kind of purging is shown by Machiavelli’s worldly reduction of it. For him, morality and religion are effectively the same because morality cannot prove that humans are able to afford to be moral without recourse to divinity in the next world. The god must be there to punish and reward, and to do so he makes commands on humans who as such are imperfect sinners. Yet most
humans—the people—are imperfect sinners because they are too weak to sin without fearing the consequences. So they must have religion—but they cannot live by it. The necessity of living by religion is counteracted by the necessary impossibility of doing so. Men being sinners, they cannot live without sinning. So they need a church and a priesthood that both enforces the commands of religion and provides the relief of forgiveness from those commands.

For Machiavelli, religion is not the overcoming of the world’s necessities that it claims to be. In its promises as well as in its demands it accords with the necessity arising from human weakness. It is not concerned with goodness, or not so much as it is concerned as with predicting and controlling the future, hence providing security for human weakness. More than finding remedies for their faults humans want to know what is in store for them as they are; they prefer security to reform. Religion is essentially an attempt to master fortune, but “the present religion,” as he describes Christianity (D 1.pr.), does this in the interest of priests who do not believe in it. His own replacement or reformation of Christianity, putting it under the mastery of the princes of the world, does no more disrespect to Christianity than Christianity has done to itself. Christianity, he says, “shows the truth and the true way,” a careful statement that falls definitively short of saying that it is true (D 2.2.2; 3.1.4; cf. 1.12.2). Christianity will indeed show the truth and the true way as Machiavelli appropriates it to his own use in accordance with its “effectual truth” as modes and orders of human government with which, as we have seen, he will redeem the sinfulness of the world. His own atheism will take advantage of the atheism of Christian priests who “do not fear the punishment that they do not see
and do not believe” (D 3.1.4). But it will not be able to abolish religion and will not try.

Religion and pre-Machiavellian morality will continue in the world as the necessary dissatisfaction with its uncertainties and the unpredictability of fortune. Machiavelli surely encourages cynicism about morality, but he knows that he cannot convince most people to abandon morality. Resistance to necessity in the form of morality is as necessary as the failure of morality. “Goodness is not enough” (la bontà non basta, D 3.30.1), but it will not disappear. Hence Machiavelli does not attempt to construct a universal new morality as did later thinkers on the basis of a universal right of self-preservation. According to him virtue for the princes will always have to contend with goodness for peoples (see D 1.18.3-4). The prospect that he might be known as Old Nick and his advice become notorious as Machiavellian would neither have deterred nor surprised him.

The Machiavelli scholars who try to save his reputation will succeed with those many who are as credulous, and in their way as moral, as they are.10 But Machiavelli himself would have excused them, because they operate on a necessity he understands perhaps better than they. It should be noted that Machiavelli does not so much justify as excuse evil.11 He himself, so to speak personally, “excuses” the homicide of Remus by Romulus as well as the failure of Piero Soderini to anticipate the evil that the Medici did to him (D 1.9.2, 5; 1.52.2). The primacy of

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11 Justice is identified with necessity in P 26.103; D 1.2.5, 3.1.2.
forgiveness over justice in Machiavelli’s thought reveals his desire to replace, and assume the office of the giver of forgiveness and betrays the permanent tinge of Christianity to his anti-Christian thought.

A special challenge for the credulous scholars is the Machiavellian speech of an unnamed leader of the plebeian Ciompi rebellion in Florence, which because of its repeated reliance on “necessity” deserves (and bears) close examination here (FH 3.13). The orator speaks, it is said, “to inspire the others,” but he says that he teaches what necessity requires.\textsuperscript{12} Apparently necessity sometimes needs to be inspired in those to whom it applies; necessity does not necessarily make itself effectual but has to be taught in a striking way. He begins by saying that if he had to deliberate whether to take up arms, burn and rob homes, and despoil churches, he would agree “to put quiet poverty ahead of perilous gain.” No moral qualm at these deeds would occur to him! But speaking now in the midst of rebellion, he says that we have no choice but to multiply the evils already committed and add more companions in them so that more will suffer, because universal injuries are borne more patiently than particular ones. Thus can we gain pardon more easily as well as “live with more freedom and more satisfaction than we have in the past.” Here a gallon of whitewash is needed to save Machiavelli as the champion of republican freedom and virtue.

\textsuperscript{12} The unnamed orator is surely Michele di Lando, who is identified and praised to the skies for his goodness (\textit{bontà}) (by contrast to the “Duke of Athens” in FH 3.16-18), goodness that “never allowed a thought to enter his mind that might be contrary to the universal good.” One wonders whether goodness so ambitiously defined might yet be compatible with the unnamed orator’s urging of wickedness.
The orator goes on to disparage the nobles who oppose the plebs. Don't be dismayed by their antiquity of blood, he exclaims: “Strip all of us naked, you will see that we are all alike.” Forget conscience and possible infamy, for where, as with us, there is “fear of hunger and prison, there cannot and should not be fear of hell.” And then he generalizes grandly: “For faithful servants are always servants and good men are always poor.” “God and nature” have put us where we are, in the midst of exposure to wickedness. So “one should use force whenever the occasion for it is given to us.” This is a course of action, “I confess,” says the orator, that is bold and dangerous, but when necessity presses, boldness is judged prudence. “Spirited men never take account of the danger in great things, for those enterprises that are begun with danger always end with reward.”

The original claim that this circumstance is special, the initial concession that one should hesitate over “perilous gain,” are entirely withdrawn. To be in the midst of a plebeian rebellion is not exceptional but reveals the essential situation of man: all of us stripped naked, exposed to danger and wickedness. Here is Thomas Hobbes’s state of nature, and not just in embryo but born alive and kicking. The nature of man’s situation is taken from the extreme case and made universal to cover all normal cases. In fact, the concept of “normal” as opposed to abnormal is reversed so that the abnormal, formerly the exception, becomes the rule. Here too the future course of modern science is previewed: the nature of man is taken from nature stripped of convention, as it were in a laboratory experiment when nature is tortured and everything normally hidden emerges. In the practice of experiment scientific fact is disclosed as opposed to ordinary observations made complacently
without benefit of the pressure of necessity. We should also notice the ambition of the orator for great things and his willingness to face great danger in enterprises with the expectation of reward.\textsuperscript{13}

The plebeian orator who “inspires” the mob by appealing to necessity shows again the unexpected complexity of Machiavelli’s profession of that notion. Humans must not only choose necessity but also be inspired to choose it. That politics is ruled by necessity does not at all mean that political things must be accepted as they are with resignation, leading to disdain for the political life and the search for “quiet poverty” in contemplation, perhaps, that the orator momentarily considered attractive.\textsuperscript{14} Instead, Machiavelli seeks to inspire (\textit{inanimare}) his readers with a spiritedness (\textit{animo}) that will lead them to virtue (\textit{virtù}) in the sort of active acquisition that he defines as the political life. \textit{Animo} easily recalls the \textit{thumos} by which the classical political scientists referred to the spirited part of the soul. Machiavelli does not mention the soul in \textit{The Prince} and the \textit{Discourses on Livy}, his two chief works, and he seems to treat \textit{animo} as his replacement for soul, substituting \textit{animo} for \textit{anima}.

The necessity for \textit{animo} is further complicated by the complacency of routine that all the achievements of virtue induce. Machiavelli presents this untoward consequence of virtue in a well-known passage in his \textit{Florentine Histories} discussing the fourth of his seven inquiries in that book (FH 5.1). There seems to be a cycle in

\textsuperscript{13} “And it should be considered that nothing is more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to put oneself at the head of introducing new orders.” \textit{P} 6. 23; cf. \textit{D} 3.35.1.

\textsuperscript{14} See Marsilius of Padua on the notion of “voluntary poverty,” \textit{Defender of the Peace} 2:12-14. The word “sect” occurs 13 times in this work.
history in which “virtue gives birth to quiet, quiet to leisure, leisure to disorder, disorder to ruin,” and then from ruin a rise in reverse through the stages. The danger of leisure is paramount, and especially the use of leisure for philosophy illustrated in the protest by Cato against the corrupting presence of philosophy in Rome. Applying this dilemma between what is good for a republic and what is good for philosophy to his time, and to the difference between the “virtue and greatness” of the ancients and the weakness of the moderns, Machiavelli closes with a suggestion. “Perhaps,” he says, it may be no less useful to know the modern weakness than the ancient strength, because if the latter excites “the liberal spirits” \(i \text{ liberali animi}\) to follow, the former will excite such spirits to avoid and eliminate it. That is a statement of Machiavelli’s liberal spirit, and apparently he has a remedy for avoiding the cyclical necessity of virtue and disorder.

The general program for a lasting or even permanent revival out of weakness is supplied in his *Discourses on Livy*. There he concludes that “nothing is more necessary” in any common way of life “than to give back to it the reputation it had in its beginnings” (D 3.1.6). Necessity leads out of necessity when prudently understood as requiring a return to the beginnings and to the original fear that underlies the complacency of civilization. This return has to be a political act, a sensational change of regime that catches attention as opposed to the steady accumulation of property that later Machiavellians, agreeing with Machiavelli as to the necessity to acquire, substituted for the riskiness of Machiavellian virtue.\(^{15}\) As virtue is risky, the goal of virtue is glory, which one might say is a semblance of

\(^{15}\) “Economism is Machiavellianism come of age”; Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), 49.
noblility. In the sense of glory, nobility is not opposed to necessity but rather gained through necessity, an insight for which Machiavelli praises “certain moral philosophers” he does not name (D 1.4-5, 43; 2.12.3; 3.12.1). Fraud, for example, might seem to be necessary though “detestable,” but no, fraud in managing war is glorious (D. 3.40.1). Machiavelli’s use of fraud, one might propose, is the highest degree of his glory.

So understood, Machiavelli can return his profession of necessity to the profession of good, the latter having been duly limited and disciplined. The new prince must arm his subjects, not all of them because that is not possible, but some of them. Which should he choose? On thinking it through, he will see that it is easier to gain to himself those who had been content with the previous state, his former enemies, rather than with his former friends, who had their own reason for becoming so and would be more demanding of him (P 20.83, 86). In Machiavelli’s own case, he would, one supposes, be thinking of Christian priests as his new friends. Such a course may not be perfect, but one can never seek to avoid one inconvenience without running into another, and prudence consists in picking the less bad inconvenience as good (P 21.91). The next chapter of *The Prince* on the secretaries to the prince discusses only one case, that of a minister who is more excellent than the prince he advises. One knows of necessity, Machiavelli says, that this prince was either in the first rank of inventiveness or the second, being able to recognize good deeds though incapable of conceiving them. This minister “cannot hope to deceive him and remains good himself” (P 22.92).

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16 Thus what is necessary can also be understood as the “more honorable part,” D 1.7.4.
At least in the case of a minister advising a prince, then, it is necessary for the minister to appear good and faithful. Machiavelli as adviser to princes is of necessity faithless to any particular one of them, because his advice is general or universal and can be used by the enemies of any prince whom he advises. But Machiavelli is himself also under the necessity of proving to be good for the princes he advises and not merely offering irresponsible advice in order to make himself look good. We see that necessity is judged, in the end, by how much good it leads to—even if the good in this case is only apparent. Machiavelli the professor of necessity is obliged to profess the necessity of the good. His early adumbration of the fact/value distinction is obliged to accept the fact of value as well as the value of fact. One gets a glimpse of the humanitarian science in Francis Bacon’s thought, powerful today, in which the noble cause of man shines forth from the objectivity of science, oblivious to any cause. Science is a substitute for religion above all in its claim—fraudulent?—to be above man, above his world comprising his interests and his necessities. It has forsaken Machiavelli’s focus on uno solo, in favor of being an open conspiracy of adepts and believers without a prince, or without any prince known to it. Instead of the false imagining of revelation, science proposes the authority of fact, evident fact, evidence—the visible. Even the invisible in science leaves its trace in what is visible for the human eye, which however aided by an instrument, still needs to look. With this continuing dependency science reveals its reliance on nature and thus its inability to master nature by reducing it to mere fact.

“Fact” in Hobbes’s Leviathan
I do not believe that “fact” in our sense occurs in Bacon or Descartes, but it
does occur frequently in Hobbes’s Leviathan. The old sense of “fact” takes it from
the Latin factum, past participle of facere, meaning something done, a deed. In this
older sense deed is opposed to speech, deeds vs. speeches. Factum also had a legal
sense from the Roman law, meaning a criminal deed in particular. Following
Hobbes’s text, one finds all three meanings subtly woven together to support an
obvious threefold theme of the Leviathan: the critique of the imagination, the
mocking, contemptuous rejection of “visible species” (i.e., Aristotle’s formal and
final causes), and the opposition of fact to imagination.

The first instance of “facts” at the beginning of Chapter 5 is to “laws and facts”
that lawyers add together to find right and wrong: the old meaning, facts as
(perhaps criminal) deeds (5.64.2417). But at the end of the chapter occurs the first
reference to the new meaning, “sense and memory are but knowledge of fact”
(5.72.17) and the distinction between science and knowledge of fact, “a thing past
and irrevocable.” In the next chapter the old meaning recurs, regarding revenge for
some “fact” (6.86.14). In the next chapter after that, the new meaning appears, now
expanded to include the future but denying knowledge of it: there is no “absolute
knowledge of fact, past or to come” (7.98.18). There is nothing complete, perfect,
and necessary about fact. Then, near the end of the chapter one faces a new
consideration: when two or more men know “the same fact” they are said to be
“conscious” of it and the “fittest witnesses” of it, originally as shared, then
metaphorically (perhaps as shared with God) as knowledge of their own “secret

References are to chapter, page, and line in Hobbes’s Leviathan, ed. Noel Malcolm,
facts.” (7.100.6). Here the two meanings converge; crime or sin is a fact that requires witnesses, suggesting without say so that knowledge of fact might be a problem.

In Chapter 9, two kinds of knowledge are introduced: of fact and of consequences of affirmations. The former is “absolute knowledge,” in contradiction of the statement in Chapter 7 above, as opposed to the conditional knowledge of science. The absolute knowledge of fact is when we see a “fact” in the doing or remember it done, which is also the knowledge of a witness. Science belongs to “a philosopher,” one who “pretends to reasoning.” So philosophers should stay away from facts and leave them to those who see or witness them. The latter have “absolute knowledge” in the sense of secure from philosophical elaboration either by another or by themselves. Hobbes excludes the sort of reasoning Socrates practiced of questioning whether one really knows what one claims to know. He then moves to the “register” of knowledge of facts “called History,” divided into natural and civil. “Natural” history is of “such Facts or Effects of Nature, as have no Dependence on Man’s Will, as opposed to the “Voluntary Actions of men in Commonwealths” (9.124.11). The latter would be deeds but the former facts are definitely not deeds, not human actions. Here “facts,” also called “effects,” leave the arena of deeds and even of human perceptions, as in Chapters 5 and 7.

“Some new fact” adds event to the growing meaning of fact (14.210.17), and then a new distinction is presented between “a question of Fact” and a question of right in law, so that a guilty purpose, not a deed, is still a “fact,” though not for a human judge (15.238.4, 15.240.24; 27. 452. 25). The argument turns and grows
more pointed when Hobbes turns to fact as sin, for a sin is a fact, or deed, known to God. David “repented the fact” of his sin in killing Uriah, but this deed was not unjust because Uriah was David’s subject, though it was a sin because David was God’s subject (21.330.19). But can the fact of a sin, known to God, be known as fact by men? When Hobbes comes to distinguishing a sin from a crime, the answer is no. To intend is a sin, but a crime is in the “fact,” the deed. “So that every crime is a sin but not every sin a crime” (27.452.24). But the judge of a crime must take notice of the “fact,” the deed, “from none but the witnesses” (26.438.12). Then passing from legal doctrine to Scripture, Hobbes says that testimony of other history is “the only proof of matter of fact,” for reason serves only to convince of truth of consequence, not of “fact” (33.588.22)—which takes us back to the distinction between fact and science in Chapter 5 (while introducing the phrase that David Hume was to make memorable).

To sum up: the legal meaning of “fact” as deed introduces the requirement of witnesses to the fact, but the distinction between crime and sin discloses that there are no human witnesses to sin. Knowledge of the fact of sin is not available, because it cannot be reached by reasoning but only by fact as visible, to which there must be reliable witnesses. So the discovery of fact curtails the cooperative work of reason and imagination that might otherwise confirm the existence of sin and of God. The stubbornness of fact defends the stubbornness of man.