Approaching Leo Strauss: Some Comments on "Thoughts on Machiavelli"


The publication of Leo Strauss's *Studies in Platonic Philosophy*, more than a decade after Strauss's death, is evidence that his work endures, and of something more. On the first point, it is sufficient to mention that the book was widely noticed, notwithstanding that, save for two short notes on Maimonides, it is an assemblage of previously published pieces. On the second, we may take our bearings from some of the more testy exchanges the book prompted. They demonstrate that Strauss's capacity for inducing confusion, uncertainty, and, ultimately, wonder, has not abated in the years since his death. If a measure of the power of the written word is its tendency to spark disagreement and controversy, then it may be said that Strauss's power as a writer and teacher is greater now than ever. In the past, for example, the battle lines in the arguments over Strauss were fairly simple. They could generally be drawn between Strauss and his adherents and those—typically those he placed among the positivists and historicists—who adamantly opposed his methods and arguments. We now find, however, Strauss's former students, and their students, differing in the most extraordinary terms over the fundamentals of Strauss's teaching and intention. Indeed, among those who openly follow Strauss, the very term "Straussian" has become suspect.

This presents a rather unsettling prospect for anyone, in particular any beginning student, who seeks to understand what Strauss was about. To keep a scorecard in the Straussian equivalent of the "Battle of the Books," one would need separate columns for Strauss and his enemies, Strauss and his purported friends, and Strauss and his innovative interpreters. At the risk of appearing overly optimistic or hopelessly naive, I think this is encouraging, even comforting. Despite the sense that most of the public disputes over Strauss shed more heat than light, the disputes themselves suggest that Strauss's work achieves the standards he set for the most excellent kind of writing. For a start, they show that Strauss, to borrow his words, has a place in that "small minority of . . . public speakers or writers" who offer us the opportunity—even force it upon us—to choose between different views and thereby provide the conditions for "intellectual independence" and "the only freedom of thought which is of political importance." Here, I think, M.F. Burnyeat’s splenetic attack upon Strauss, who in Burnyeat’s caricature becomes a "guru of American conservatism," is more revealing than Burnyeat intends. In his obvious relief that in Britain—or at least among the Britons with whom Burnyeat is comfortable—"Strauss has no discernible influence . . . at all," Burnyeat suggests that he and his circle are in the grips of what Strauss called the logica equina, i.e., they live in a world that has spurned independent thinking and intellectual independence by disallowing the saying of the "thing which is not." If Strauss presents an alternative to what Burnyeat and his circle believe, and that seems uncontestable according to what Burnyeat says, then the absence of a Straussian influence would, I should think, be regretted by any among them who truly value freedom of thought. By the same token, in acknowledging Strauss's influence in the United States at the same time that he so vociferously attacks him, Burnyeat acknowledges, without realizing it, that Strauss presents alternatives that must still be taken seriously here. Thus, Strauss's arguments are among those things that guarantee that his adopted country will remain a "bulwark of freedom," as he called it. At the political level, Strauss's legacy serves a high purpose indeed.

4. Thoughts on Machiavelli (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), 13, hereafter TM. Burnyeat seems to be correct about Strauss's influence in Britain, or at least about British resistance to
There is, as well, another purpose that Strauss still serves. Insofar as he elicits confusion and uncertainty without endangering curiosity and wonder, he is true to what he called philosophy as it was "originally meant," an enterprise marked by the tension between the proposition that all men desire to know and an aphorism which characterizes a wise man as one who is able, without embarrassment, to say that he knows that he knows nothing.' In this respect, Strauss's teaching may be considered old-fashioned in general, as well as in the sort of specifics he lays out in the epilogue to Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics, where he takes on the "new political science," and in Thoughts on Machiavelli, where he sides with the "old-fashioned and simple opinion" regarding Machiavelli as opposed to the opinion of "up-to-date scholars."6 In his faithfulness to the old-fashioned, the traditional, and philosophy according to its original meaning, Strauss offers an alternative to the opposed but characteristic extremes of modern thought, the one arising in the rationalism typically identified with Hobbes, the other in the willfulness typically identified with Rousseau. In being perplexing without being intellectually disheartening, in other words, Strauss provides an antidote to the faith-albeit now much attenuated-that eventuates in certainty that man can resolve or eradicate all mysteries and the radical doubt-indistinguishable from certainty-about the reality of anything that eventuates in nihilism and the denial of the very notion of mystery.

Strauss's philosophic impact may be seen, among other places, in the exchanges in the Claremont Review between Thomas Pangle and Harry Jaffa concerning Pangle's introduction to Studies. Now this is not the place to deal with the questions that divide Pangle and Jaffa-they range from how to read Strauss to how to read Pangle, from the question of who is hiding what to that of what is worth hiding. It is possible to say, however, that the essential issue between the two is the same that Strauss takes as a theme in Persecution and the Art of Writing "the problem of the relation between philosophy and

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5. TM, 175.
politics." Thus, among other things, Pangle and Jaffa reveal how Strauss compels his addressees to ask the old question of whether dedication to philosophy entails abandoning one's respect for spiritual, moral, and political authority—the view Jaffa charges Pangle with adopting and attributing to Strauss.' That Strauss can move such careful and serious readers as Pangle and Jaffa—each considers himself Strauss's defender—to differ so extremely on his intention is evidence of his nondoctrinaire and, hence, philosophic aspect. On the issue of the competing claims of philosophy and politics, and the parallel issue of the competing claims of reason and revelation, he offers no comfortable belief or framework that seemingly satisfies all potential questions. Rather, his teaching, in keeping with what he says of premodern philosophy, has the effect of freeing us from preconceived notions and forcing us to recognize the respective power of the competing claims. The Pangle-Jaffa dispute, in this sense, may be said to reflect the internal debate Strauss generates in those who read him with an open mind. Ironically, the arguments among Strauss's former students provide the greatest evidence of his success as a teacher. They demonstrate that Strauss's writings, again to borrow his terms, represent one of those rare "awakening stumbling blocks" which assure that those fortunate enough to be able to "see the wood for the trees" do not succumb to the "slumber" of those who cannot.'

Who are to be listed among the fortunate is difficult to know, of course. Moreover, to be able to differentiate the wood from the trees does not guarantee a clear perspective upon the wood, as the strength of Pangle's and Jaffa's respective accusations makes obvious. It is difficult, for example, to reconcile Pangle's admission that he is uncertain about what guided Strauss—albeit he adds a qualifying "yet"—with his emphasized assertion that for Strauss "authentic philosophers are human beings of a different kind from all other human beings." This Pangle supports with a note to passages in What Is Political Philosophy? which argue that the philosophic life transcends politics and supplies ends which politics cannot reach, and that political philosophy ultimately "transforms itself into a discipline that is no longer concerned with political things in the ordinary sense of the term." In their own, context, however, these passages fall short of suggesting that the philosopher is somehow su-

8. PAW, 22, 36.
perhuman and draw our attention to the way philosophy and the
philosophic life emerge from politics and political philosophy. Although Pangle is correct in emphasizing the uniqueness of
philosophy and its superiority to politics, in other words, he does not, it seems, do justice to that part of Strauss’s argument which forces
consideration of how politics and political philosophy lead beyond
to philosophy simply. Why, for example, does Strauss remind us in the same place that Socrates called his in-
quiries into the higher discipline "the true political skill," and that
Aristotle called his discussion of virtue and related subjects "a kind of
political science"? Moreover, why does he conclude this part of his
discussion by recalling how men of the "prephilosophic," hence
political, life "divined the "greater freedom and the higher dignity
of the more retired life of men who were `minding their own busi-
ness," thereby suggesting some kind of commonality between pre-
philosophic or political and philosophic men?\(^9\) Whereas, in short,
Pangle urges the difference between philosophers and other human
beings, Strauss seems to take care to mention the things which bind
philosophers to other human beings.

The puzzling aspects of Pangle’s essay aside, therefore, it, like Jaf-fa’s response, points to the slumber-destroying interaction of philos-
ophy and politics in Strauss’s work. That some would say that such in-
teraction is presented from a philosophic point of view does not deny
that Strauss, on the evidence of his writing, never forgot politics. He
did not write for "perfect philosophers" (what need would be served
by that?) and the philosophic bearing of his work does not foreclose
its political bearing. As he reminds us in *Persecution and the Art of
Writing* philosophers recommended education as the only answer to
"the political question par excellence, [the question] of how to recon-
cile order which is not oppression with freedom which is not license."
Here, of course, Strauss recalls a tradition at least as old as Socrates, to
whom Strauss leads us in explaining the "love" which draws philos-
ophers to others and the reverse.\(^10\) In Strauss’s world, as in Plato’s, to
be human implies contact with others, which would seem to mean
that politics is unavoidable. Strauss does not allow us the luxury-
which I take to be the same thing as surrendering to slumber-of ig-noring politics out of our love for something greater. It need hardly
be added that this also means we are not to ignore it for love of some-
thing lesser.

\(^9\) Studies, 1, 9; *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Ill., 1959), 9

\(^{10}\) PAW, 36-37.
The arguments of Strauss's champions and his detractors, then, have at least this in common. They cause us to ask how we are to come to balance the two ends of his argument, the philosophical and the political. To ask this, in turn, means facing the obstacle of Strauss's enigmatic style. In greater or lesser degree, most of Strauss's writing—particularly, I think, that of the American phase of his career—is characterized by the same esotericism that he was famous for rediscovering in the writers of the past. To read him is to encounter or stumble over the kinds of devices employed by his major subjects, e.g., numerological patterns, garbled quotations, pregnant silences, deliberate self-contradictions. Even casual readers, for instance, will find it intriguing that the chapter on *The Prince* in *Thoughts on Machiavelli* has the same number of paragraphs as *The Prince* has chapters—twenty-six—or that *Studies'* chapter on Machiavelli would have been chapter thirteen had Strauss lived to write a projected essay on Plato's *Gorgias*. What such numbers represent is open to question. Thirteen, for example, is typically identified with vice and excess, but it can have positive connotations. More to the point, Strauss's use of esoteric devices indicates the simultaneous meticulousness and elusiveness of his teaching. Here, to refer again to his Machiavelli work, one thinks of the lovely symmetry of the last chapter of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, where at the precise center of the argument—in the forty-fourth of eighty-seven paragraphs—we find a simple statement of Machiavelli's approach to religion and morality, the topics to which the chapter as a whole is devoted. The simplicity of the statement, on the other hand, is qualified by the fact that at its peripheries Strauss says that Machiavelli distinguishes religion and justice or goodness and that Machiavelli integrates morality into religion, which would seem to be conflicting positions. Similar instances may be found throughout Strauss's writing, and, no doubt, most readers will have their favorites. To repeat, however, it does not take overly assiduous reading to recognize the care with which Strauss composed. To come to terms with his teaching, then, we first have to come to terms with his style.

11. The information about Strauss's intention to write on the *Gorgias* for *Studies* is supplied by Cropsey in the foreword. Here, too, we are told that Strauss chose the title for the book, its selections, and their order. For some of the positive connotations of thirteen, see Strauss's introductory essay in the S. Pines translation of *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago, 1963), vol.1, xxxiii-xxxiv. The middle paragraph of chapter 4 of TM is on pages 231-32. One of the other curiosities in TM is Strauss's treatment of Dante, who is cited thirteen times in the index but mentioned fourteen times in the text (the
According to one interpretation, Strauss's method of writing is attributable to the danger of persecution, which Strauss identified as a principal reason for esotericism. But this is not a wholly satisfactory answer to why Strauss wrote as he did. As he says in his essay on the subject, writers who conceal their views solely to escape persecution are relatively easy to decipher, which is not the case for Strauss. Moreover, given Strauss's outspokenness on the intellectual fashions of his day and that the final and most productive stage of his career was spent in a genuinely liberal political and religious environment, it is hard to attribute his style to any fear for his own welfare. There are, on the other hand, reasons other than persecution for writing between the lines, and Strauss himself tells us of them. For a start, there is the idea to which we have already alluded. Books written in the style in question may "owe their existence to the love of the mature philosopher for the puppies of his race," a love which culminates in the recommendations on education of philosophers in general. Thus the hidden or difficult to attain teaching becomes a vehicle for attracting and tantalizing the best students, for drawing them to the higher teaching as it were. On this point, for example, we are led to recall Strauss's recounting of Machiavelli's famous account of how, in the evenings, he would be received into the "ancient courts of ancient men," a recounting that is faithful to the original with one exception. It omits Machiavelli's comment that in the "ancient courts" he escaped boredom.

The idea that esoteric writing serves an educational purpose returns us to the question of how Strauss deals with the potentially conflicting demands of philosophy and politics. In its educational role, esotericism may be understood as a way to steer between such demands without slighting the responsibilities that attach to teaching. As Strauss puts it, the author who writes between the lines may be seeking to guide his addressees, the young men who might become philosophers, from the "popular views which are indispensable for all practical and political purposes to the truth which is merely and
purely theoretical. In this sense, esoteric writing represents a via media between politics and philosophy. It points us back to our political roots and forward to the things which may transcend politics. It follows that we may view Strauss’s style as an integral part of his response to the problem of relating philosophy and politics. Rather than finding it "rebarbative" (Burnyeat’s word), rejecting it, or thinking it an obstacle to understanding, the open-minded student will look upon it as a pathway to Strauss’s teaching.

With this in mind, we turn to Thoughts on Machiavelli. Our purpose, which reflects what Strauss calls his purpose in Thoughts, is to point to the way which the reader must take in studying Strauss. There are a number of reasons for choosing Thoughts as a text in this regard. Most important, it includes considerable material on the problem of relating philosophy and politics. Strauss’s Machiavelli bears primary responsibility for overturning the ancient and medieval way of looking upon this relationship and provides the necessary support for looking upon it in a new way. Thus, in explicitly attending to Machiavelli’s transformation of former ways of thinking, Thoughts has much to say about philosophy and politics. Indeed, the two concerns literally provide the boundaries, or the outer framework, for the book’s argument as a whole. It is at the outset of Thoughts’ introduction that Strauss associates himself with the opinion that Machiavelli was a teacher of evil, an opinion he immediately reinforces by listing a series of Machiavelli’s more extreme political rules. This association with the anti-Machiavellian political viewpoint is then borne home in the introduction’s penultimate paragraphs, where Strauss says that his subject is particularly apt in the context of the United States, which "may be said to be the only country in the world which was founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles." Our initial impression of Thoughts, therefore, is that it is a book about Machiavelli’s politics and political philosophy, and what opposes them. In the book’s concluding sentences, however, Strauss emends Hegel’s statement on philosophy—"for while ‘philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying,’ it is of necessity edifying"—to
the end of supporting the seeming need to "return to the fundamental experiences" that might restore the notion of the "primacy of the good." Whereas *Thoughts* opens with political opinions and raises a practical political standard—the United States—it closes with a theoretical supposition regarding the primacy of the Good and reminds us about the nature of philosophy. Alternatively, one may say that *Thoughts*, in keeping with Strauss's description of the books of great writers, progresses from the practical and political to the theoretical and philosophical. In either case, the relationship of its beginning and end calls for reconsideration of our political and philosophical foundations, i.e., our political opinions and principles as opposed to our fundamental experiences.

Another reason for choosing *Thoughts* as a text follows the argument that the style and substance of Strauss's teaching are integrated. On this basis, *Thoughts* provides an especially good opportunity for investigating Strauss's teaching because its esotericism is so obvious. We do not have to strain to see it nor worry overmuch that it exists more in our imagination than in the book's words, which is always a danger when one mixes with esoteric writings. On this point, it is hard to improve upon Harvey Mansfield, Jr.'s characterization of *Thoughts*. Using Strauss's term, he calls the book "exoteric, . . . that is, a book containing much that is appreciably esoteric to any ordinary reader stated in a manner so elusive or so challenging as to cause him to give up trying to understand it." In turn, a reader so presumptuous or foolhardy as to try to separate himself from Mansfield's "ordinary readers" soon comes to sympathize with Willmoore Kendall's lament that in order to understand the book a reader will have to set aside all else for six months. This, perhaps, is Kendall's mischievous restatement of Strauss's warning in *Thoughts* that some books "do not reveal their full meaning as intended by the author unless one ponders over them 'day and night' for a long time." If one adds Strauss's statement in the immediate sequel that "the reader who is properly prepared . . . comes to understand the truth that what ought not to be said cannot be said," one almost despairs of penetrating to the meaning of *Thoughts*, let alone of being able to pass on some portion of that meaning to others!

14. TM, 9, 13, 299.
15. Mansfield, "An Exchange," 372; W. Kendall, "Review of *Thoughts on Machiavelli*," *Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966), 251; TM, 174. It may be telling that Strauss's statement on the limitation of speaking and writing is almost at the center of the last chapters, the eighty-sixth of the 172 paragraphs that comprise TM's comprehensive argu-
Strauss’s warnings are suggestive as well as daunting, however. In coupling what "ought not" to be said with what "cannot be said," he, in effect, couples a moral and political concern, the status of the "oughts," with a philosophical concern, the status of "the thing which is not." In other words, to borrow again from Persecution and the Art of Writing, the statement in Thoughts combines a question upon which men differ politically, what ought to be said, with one that divides them philosophically, whether it is possible to say or to say reasonably "the thing which is not." Curiously, in both cases, Thoughts seems to take the side with which Strauss has little apparent sympathy in Persecution. The suggestion that there are things which ought not to be said seems to place it with the oppressors or the rulers of nonliberal societies and the suggestion that such things cannot be said seems to agree with the notion that certain things are unspoken of the horse-drawn Parmenides or Gulliver’s Houyhnhnms. Thus, before we even approach the substance of Thoughts, we are led to wonder whether Strauss’s style, which presumably bears out his statement on what ought not and cannot be said, is more than a means of avoiding persecution or of effectively teaching. Is it a comment on the position of a writer in Machiavelli’s world, which somehow seems to combine the logic of political oppression with the logica equina? Alternatively, given that Strauss also indicates that it is a "truth" that such "great" men as Goethe rediscovered before "the last vestiges of the recollection of what philosophy originally meant" were lost, is it a comment on the way philosophers not under Machiavelli’s influence looked upon politics and philosophy, or upon their responsibility to their friends and fellow citizens as well as to the truth?"

Strauss’s stance on speaking and writing, then, is enigmatic in that it seems to point both towards the way of Machiavelli and towards the way Machiavelli purportedly overturns. This, as it turns out, provides a clue about Strauss’s general procedure in Thoughts. Notwithstanding his explicit assertions regarding Machiavelli’s departure from earlier ways of speaking and thinking, he continually reminds us of the potential points of contact, between Machiavelli’s ways and earlier ways. As already indicated, for example, in its own context his

16. PAW, 23; TM, 174. How one balances responsibility to the truth and to one’s friends is, of course, a very old problem. See, e.g., Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1096a14; Dante, Monarchia, III.i, Paradiso, XVII. 106-20.
statement on what ought not and cannot be said provides a link between "books like the Discourses and the Prince" and the idea of "what philosophy originally meant." Similarly, Strauss sometimes seems reticent to delineate the line between Machiavelli and what Strauss calls the Great Tradition, or at least to delineate it with the kind of exactitude we might expect given the forthrightness of Thoughts' opening. In comparing Machiavelli’s views to prior philosophical and religious views in a series of related passages, for example, Strauss speaks of how Machiavelli breaks with the Great Tradition and ushers in the Enlightenment—at the least implying that prior thought, from Machiavelli’s perspective, represents something unified or integrated. He then, however, declares that Machiavelli is an "extremist in the sense that he challenges the whole philosophical and religious tradition"—thereby raising at least the possibility that the prior philosophical and religious traditions are distinguishable and that the unity of the Great Tradition may be problematic. This leaves us puzzled as to the consistency of the world Machiavelli confronts. Midway between the passages at issue, our puzzlement is somewhat relieved as Strauss briefly and succinctly draws out the opposition between Aristotle’s God and the Biblical God." The result is that we are led to wonder whether Machiavelli is equally abusive of all prior religious and philosophical thought, which means that we are led to wonder about the thoroughness of Machiavelli’s break with the Great Tradition.

That Strauss adopts a style associated with Machiavelli and with philosophy as it was originally meant indicates, therefore, that his presentation of Machiavelli is not so clear-cut as it might first appear. Strauss’s own style, in other words, calls attention to the possibility that his "new and strange" Machiavelli is still tied to former ways of thinking. On this point, we may refer again to Strauss’s treatment of writing, this time attending to his express presentation of Machiavelli’s approach to the subject. In a series of thirteen paragraphs at the center of Thoughts, Strauss draws our attention to Machiavelli’s challenge to "all writers" and his opposition to the "whole tradition" and "the common opinion" concerning the comparative wisdom and constancy of the multitude and the prince, i.e., Machiavelli’s argument that the wisdom of the multitude is not inferior to that of princes. This is Machiavelli’s most openly heterodox position and sets the stage, as Strauss says in the preceding paragraph,

for the birth of modern philosophy. In the course of the discussion, however, we discover that Machiavelli’s challenge to "the common opinion" amounts to a defense of "the universal opinion" of the multitude—or of "the voice of God." In "appearing" to be the "first philosopher" to challenge "the aristocratic premise which informed classical philosophy," Machiavelli’s heterodoxy is qualified. What had formerly not seemed allowable to say is in reality something which places Machiavelli on the side of the people, who are the conservative force or the "repository" of morality and religion in the Machiavellian scheme. Machiavelli’s most heterodox saying allies him with the forces of righteousness. Conversely, that which makes him "the first" modern philosopher and signals his turn from former writers and the common opinion does not isolate him from princes, whom Machiavelli comforts with the thought that the people still need guidance with regard to particulars. Thus, in saying what had formerly not been sayable, Machiavelli says something that is quite acceptable both to the people and to the princes. Our sense of how Machiavelli operates here is further expanded when Strauss apparently digresses to mention that the "most shocking" or "most Machiavellian" passage in the *Florentine Discourses* is a speech Machiavelli places in the mouth of a plebian leader of the Florentine plebs.¹⁸ Machiavelli’s most heterodox saying, which he pronounces in his own name, is different from his most shocking saying, which is pronounced in the name of another. At the very least this obscures the question of what ought not to be said and leads one to think there is nothing that cannot be said provided that one is careful, the fact that former writers—not to speak of the "whole tradition"—did not say it notwithstanding.

At the end of the series in question, however, our confidence that we can say anything if we are clever or careful is shaken. Strauss opens this paragraph by describing Machiavelli's treatment of Livy, wherein Machiavelli tends to erase the distinction between an author having his characters "say" what they say and "do" what they do. As Strauss presents it, Machiavelli’s Livy—"our historian"—is more than a mere historian, i.e., one who describes what men have done. He is also a creator, one who teaches "'oughts' through making his excellent characters say and do things which excellent men ought to say and do, i.e., through acts of fiction." In Machiavelli’s scheme, therefore, "oughts," including presumably what ought to be said, are essentially the products of invention, unlimited other than by the inventive capacity of writers. At this point, Strauss turns from

¹⁸. TM, 127-31. The starting point for Strauss’s discussion is *Discourses*, 1.58 (I.217).
Machiavelli's conception of Livy to Machiavelli’s conception of the Biblical writers. We learn that for Machiavelli the Biblical writers are also inventors. In the guise of reporting what God said and did, they make God say and do what they think a "perfect being" ought to say and do. Machiavelli’s explanation of the roots of Biblical belief, therefore, sets him against the only proof of the existence of the Biblical God which commands respect, the ontological proof, and presupposes "his destructive analysis of the phenomenon known to us as the conscience." If the beginning of our series of passages leads us to think that there is nothing which ought not and cannot be said, the end reminds us that this does not account for God or the conscience. To accept Machiavelli’s presentation of what ought and can be said would apparently deny, as Strauss puts it later in the context of his statement on what ought not and cannot be said, the "fullness of vision" or vantage point of a Goethe, who speaks to us of the "pious and conscientious spirit" which guards against the Machiavellian viewpoint.

This brings us to the middle paragraph in our series, the ninety-ninth paragraph of the body of Thoughts and the 111th of the 221 paragraphs of the whole. Its subject is Machiavelli’s handling of the "problem posed by the difference between Livy and Livy’s characters," which Strauss illustrates by noting the different treatments of Livy in the first and the last two books of the Discourses. We learn that only in the last books does Machiavelli use expressions that demonstrate that Livy "makes someone say or do certain things" or puts words "into the mouth of someone," i.e., expressions that in our last paragraph indicate that Machiavelli views Livy as an inventor or creator. On the other hand, we also learn that in the same books Machiavelli "speaks of Livy as a `witness’ (testimone) or of his `testimony’ (testimonio) or of his `vouching’ (fare fede) for something," i.e., expressions which associate Livy with Biblical writers insofar as they attest to that over which writers have no control, a point that Strauss’s repetition of the Italian—which he does infrequently in Thoughts—emphasizes. In other words, Machiavelli’s representation of Livy as a creator or inventor is mitigated by his representation of Livy in the same terms that Biblical writers present themselves, as reporters of what they and others have experienced. From the Machiavellian standpoint, it would seem, Livy’s excellence or

19. TM, 148-49, 329, n. 1. The analysis of Machiavelli’s destructive analysis of the conscience is expanded thirty-nine paragraphs later, where Strauss says that "we become inclined to believe that, according to Machiavelli, every articulation of the dictate of conscience needs a support different from the conscience itself." (203-4)
20. TM, 137-38. See, too, 155-57.
strength sometimes is a function of his freedom as a writer, which Machiavelli is shown to exercise in our first paragraph, and sometimes from his adherence to the viewpoint represented by the Biblical writers, which Machiavelli is said to analyze destructively in our last paragraph. Is it the case, we are then led to ask, that even Machiavelli—who "says in his own name shocking things which ancient writers had said through the mouths of their characters" and who "alone has dared to utter the evil doctrine in a book and in his own name"—was limited in what he could say, in some fashion thereby accepting the argument that there are things that ought not and cannot be said that Strauss, by way of Goethe, identifies with philosophy as it was originally meant? \(^{21}\)

Strauss's statements on speaking and writing—not to mention his own manner of speaking and writing—and his account of Machiavelli's account of Livy, then, indicate that Machiavelli's heterodox and shocking teachings do not preclude the possibility that his understanding of things is in some ways consistent with the understanding of his predecessors. That is, Strauss's analysis of Machiavelli does not simply reveal the rationale for modernity, but also points to a premodern way of thinking that Machiavelli and Machiavellianism do not foreclose. \(^{22}\) By the same token, it points to the possibility that there is a consistency to human affairs in general—as to fundamental experiences—that the difference between modernity and antiquity cannot wholly obscure. Thus, at the end of *Thoughts*’ introduction, Strauss questions the contemporary argument that "Machiavelli's problem" is "fundamentally different from the problems with which earlier political philosophy was concerned," and goes on to say that his "study of Machiavelli’s teaching can ultimately have no other purpose than to contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems." *Thoughts*, in this sense, becomes an avenue to the "permanent problems," including, presumably, the problem of relating philosophy and politics.

\(^{21}\) TM, 10.

\(^{22}\) One of the questions TM raises but does not settle is why Machiavelli took the course he did, i.e., what "necessity... spurred on Machiavelli and his great successors." (298) See, e.g., L. Peterman, "Dante and the Setting for Machiavellianism," *ASPR*, 76 (1982), n. 3; idem, "Machiavelli’s Dante and the Sources of Machiavellianism," *Polity* (forthcoming). See, too, TM’s references to Machiavelli as the "only philosopher who lent his name to a way of political thinking and acting as old as political society itself," (10) and 132 (33X4) paragraphs later as the "first philosopher who believes that propaganda can bring about the coincidence of philosophy and political power." (173)
The idea that there is a tie between Machiavelli’s problem and the permanent problems provides a starting point for a more systematic introduction to *Thoughts* by underlining what Strauss, in the book’s sparse preface, describes as his theme. Among the preface’s acknowledgments, there is one passing comment of substance. In what follows, Strauss says, he will "present my observations and reflections on the problem of Machiavelli." Thus he alerts us to the idea that there is a problem, presumably a significant problem, concerning Machiavelli that *Thoughts* will develop. This idea is then reinforced and elaborated in *Thoughts*’ introduction. In itself, the introduction seems to represent *Thoughts*’ equivalent to the dedicatory epistles of *The Prince* and *Discourses* and the proems of the latter, at least insofar as it sets the tone for what is to come and provides a sense of the author’s purpose. Strauss’s frequent use here of the first person plural—three times in the first sentence alone—may, for example, be contrasted with Machiavelli’s use in his introductory remarks of the first person singular, a difference of some significance according to the internal evidence both of *Thoughts* and the notes on Maimonides that immediately precede *Studies*’ essay on Machiavelli. More significant from our perspective, however, the introduction also expressly draws attention to Machiavelli’s problem and to the potential intersection of Machiavelli’s teaching and the permanent problems.

In keeping with its design—i.e., with its role as a guidebook to what Strauss intends in *Thoughts*—the introduction also suggests something of the process by which we are to move from Machiavelli’s problem to the permanent problems. Having declared his sympathy for the unsophisticated opinion concerning Machiavelli, Strauss elucidates this opinion by repeating nine of Machiavelli’s purportedly more evil lessons. He then proceeds to evaluate how his old-fashioned view of Machiavelli compares with even earlier views and the prevailing opinions of "the learned of our day," which, one suspects,

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23. There is an interesting similarity, in this respect, between the statement of Machiavelli’s problem in the preface of TM and the statement of the problem of relating philosophy and politics in the preface of PAW.

24. *Studies*, 205, 208. For other possible connections between Machiavelli and Maimonides, see, e.g., PAW, 15, 91, n. 156. There are other curiosities in the introduction of the sort noted. Strauss’s use of the second person plural, for example, seems to set off his restatement of Marlowe’s attribution to Machiavelli of the statement "I hold there is no sin but ignorance." (p. 13) Again, we may speculate as to the possible significance of the fact that Strauss uses "we," "our," and "ourselves" twenty-six times in the introduction. See, too, 309, n. 49.
may be his ironic contemporary version of Savonarola’s account, repeated by Machiavelli, of "the wise of the world." During the course of this comparison, Strauss makes the unusually unqualified statement, for him, that "the core of Machiavelli’s thought" lies in "a comprehensive reflection regarding the status of the fatherland on the one hand and of the soul on the other." A bit later, in what I take to be the conclusion of this section of the introduction, he makes a similarly unqualified assertion: "The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things." In the last paragraph, in turn, we are introduced to the idea that there are permanent problems and reintroduced to the idea that there is a problem of Machiavelli. Thus the introduction moves us from Machiavelli’s evil teaching, to his core, to the connection between his surface problem and heart, and to the potential interconnection between his problem and the permanent problems. This seems straightforward enough. By studying Machiavelli’s evil teaching we will appreciate his core, the problem that reveals the unity of his surface and heart, and finally achieve access to the permanent problems. Yet, we cannot help being confused. We have been told of the core of Machiavelli without having been told of the problem identified with his heart. The question of whether Strauss considers the heart and core of Machiavelli synononomous aside, how can we appreciate Machiavelli’s core without knowing his problem? Alternatively, if Machiavelli’s surface problem and heart are the same, we are led to wonder about the link between his external and internal teachings.

Our confusion here may initially be forgiven on two counts. First, we are led to look for the problem of Machiavelli without any clear notion of what a problem entails. Second, and connected, we cannot be sure that we understand "problem" in the sense that Strauss intends the word. To see what "problem" entails for Strauss, we might begin by contrasting Thoughts’ introduction—at the end of which "problem" occurs in greater density than anywhere else in Strauss’s writing, insofar as I am aware—with Strauss’s essay on Machiavelli in History of Political Philosophy, where "difficulties" rather than problems are emphasized. The difference between the two rests upon

25. TM, 5, 9-13, 175. Cf. Discourses, III.30 (410). The introduction may be divided into sections of nine and three paragraphs. The last paragraph of the first section concludes with the statement concerning the surface problem. The last paragraph of the second section concludes with the statement concerning the permanent problems.
26. History of Political Philosophy, ed. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey (Chicago, 1972), 277-82. "Problem" also occurs in great density in the first paragraph of the preface to PAW. We cannot, here, consider in any depth the philosophic status of a problem, not to speak of the difficulties that surround the thought that there are permanent prob-
the perception that problems, unlike difficulties, project a kind of irresolvability or, at least resist satisfactory answers. This is not to say that all problems are worth worrying about (how many hairs must one lose before he can be called bald?) or that what appears to be a problem might turn out not to be. There is no necessary redundancy in the phrase “permanent problems,” i.e., problems which cannot be dismissed or do not disappear. On the difference between problems and difficulties, we might add, a passage in Strauss’s preface to the English translation of his Spinoza book is instructive. Discussing the “Jewish problem”-he does not call it the Jewish question-Strauss indicates, I think, the distance between problem and difficulty: “A vital need legitimately induces a man to probe whether what seems to be an impossibility is not in fact only a very great difficulty.”

Thus, moving back to Thoughts, when Strauss ends his chapter on The Prince by denoting the “difficulties” surrounding Machiavelli’s treatment of unarmed prophets and the potential for success of his “enormous venture,” we must realize we are in the realm of the manageable, i.e., that neither the situation of the unarmed prophet nor Machiavelli’s own ambition create insurmountable obstacles to his proposed new modes and orders. When Strauss ends Thoughts’ introduction, on the other hand, by bringing forward the problematic, problems. For an introduction to these matters the reader might begin with Strauss’s “Political Philosophy and History” in What Is Political Philosophy (Glencoe, Ill.; The Free Press, 1959).


28. TM, 84. Difficulties arise in other places in TM as well. In the twenty-sixth paragraph of chapter 4, for example, we are introduced to the “peculiar difficulty” to which Machiavelli’s criticism of the Bible is exposed. (207) This has to do with his replacement of humility by humanity and his identification of the virtue opposed to humility not as humanity but as magnanimity. This difficulty, in turn, may be alleviated by Strauss’s discussion, twenty-six paragraphs later, of how Machiavelli departs from the opinion of “many” regarding chance and God to raise the question of whether virtue can control nature and necessity as it can control chance. (244-45). With regard to the difficulties that arise at the end of chapter 2, our attention is drawn to the twenty-sixth paragraph of chapter 3, which is, in effect, a digression concerning the bewildering fact that in the very act of breaking with the Great Tradition, Machiavelli proved “to be the heir, the by no means unworthy heir, to that supreme art of writing which that tradition manifested at its peaks.” (120) It is here that Strauss also recounts Machiavelli’s letter concerning his evenings with the ancients and says that Machiavelli came to surpass Livy. Conversely, one may contrast the difficulties in question with Strauss’s discussion, thirty-three paragraphs earlier, of the “problem of authority” identified with the authority of the “traditional political theorists” that comes to light in Discourses, II (41).
we become aware that our investigation of Machiavelli may not have
the effect of settling our minds, either about Machiavelli or about
more comprehensive concerns. The uncertainty connected to Machi-
avelli’s problem that arises in Thoughts’ introduction, in this sense,
may be said to be connected to the greater uncertainty that will be
ours if we “recover” the permanent problems.

The second reason for our confusion about the Introduction may be
stated simply. Not everyone views problems as Strauss seems to view
them. Moreover, given that Machiavelli himself promotes an opposed
view, our confusion can be said to be due in some degree to
Machiavelli’s influence. The opposed ways of approaching problems
are illustrated later in Thoughts. On the one hand, there is Strauss’s
statement about Machiavelli’s response to the “problem posed by the
difference between Livy and Livy’s characters”—the statement at
the center of Thoughts of which we have previously spoken and will
speak further below. On the other hand, there is his statement that
Machiavelli’s manner of concealment has the effect of encouraging
problem-solving. In the first case, Machiavelli’s handling of Livy
raises an apparently intractable problem regarding writing as inven-
tion or fiction and writing as testimony or witnessing. One cannot, in
other words, consider Livy both a writer of fiction and a writer in the
sense that Biblical writers understood themselves. In the second case,
we are told that Machiavelli’s seductive and corrupting use of con-
cealment “fascinates” his “young” readers by confronting them with
riddles which make them “oblivious to all higher duties” in their “fas-
cination with problem-solving.” Thus an intractable problem at the
center of Thoughts may be contrasted with the corrupting fascination
with problem-solving that Machiavelli encourages. It is intriguing
that these passages occur at the end of sixty-five paragraphs at the
center of which Strauss recounts how Machiavelli imitates and fails to
imitate the ancients. 29 More noteworthy, however, are other passages
in which Strauss indicates where “the fascination with problem-
solving” leads.

Thoughts’ statement on problem-solving is in the second to last
paragraph of chapter 1. In the second to last paragraph of chapter 4,
the last chapter, we learn that philosophy undergoes a change in
Machiavelli’s thought. Among other things, the problem of the rela-
tion of philosophy and politics is erased as the notion of philosophy

29. TM, 50, 137-38, 86-88. In the middle paragraph, Strauss describes how Machi-
avelli urges the imitation of the ancient physicians but “does not suggest that the pre-
sent philosophers imitate the ancient philosophers.”
(or science) as a source for relieving man’s estate develops and the
coincidence of philosophy and politics is guaranteed, albeit by propa-
ganda. Paralleling these developments is an increase, as Strauss puts
it, in "the charm of competence [which] bewitches completely first a
few great men and then whole nations and indeed as it were the
whole human race." The fascination with problem-solving, we may
say, is as one with the charm of competence that looks for the erasure
of human problems by fashioning the coincidence of philosophy and
political power. In the last paragraph of chapter 3—which is midway
between the paragraphs immediately at issue in 1 and 4—we learn
more about this. Here, Strauss also remarks on Machiavelli’s belief in
"the coincidence of philosophy and political power" being brought
about by propaganda. In this case, however, we learn that this rep-
resents a "break with the Great Tradition and initiates the Enlighten-
ment." Thus, Strauss directs us from the "fascination with problem-
solving" through "the charm of competence" to Machiavelli’s break
with the Great Tradition and his initiation of the Enlightenment.

There is a difference in Strauss’s approach—and the Great Tradi-
tion’s—to problems and the approach of those who are Enlightened
in the modern sense. Machiavelli’s erasure or at least obfuscation of
the problem of relating philosophy and politics by providing for the
coincidence of philosophy and political power is but a facet of his
erasure or obfuscation of the idea that there are permanent problems.
Our confusion over the Machiavellian problem, in such terms, may be
seen as a result of the difference between Strauss’s and the Great
Tradition’s insistence that problems may be permanent and Machia-
veilli’s and the Enlightenment’s view that they are always subject to
solution if we are competent.

This helps ease our confusion about what "problem" means in
terms of Thoughts’ preface and introduction, but it does not resolve
our uncertainty about the connection of Machiavelli’s problem and
the core of his teaching. On this multifaceted question, Thoughts pro-
ceeds by way of hints. Thirty-three paragraphs after his assertion
about the surface and the heart of things, for example, Strauss speaks
of the "problem" of authority as it occurs in a section of the Discourses
which begins with a remark about what Livy fails to say, i.e., about a
"silence" of Livy. Here, we are told, Machiavelli "somewhat blurs"
the distinction between "authority" and "reason," or that between "le
cose dette" and "le ragioni," and then "stresses" that difference. The
surface problem of authority, therefore, lies in the way Machiavelli
distinguishes and fails to distinguish reason from other sources of
authority. Machiavelli’s care in this regard is indicated by what
Strauss says at the beginning and end of this paragraph. He opens by drawing attention to the difference between "deliberate self-contradiction" and "irony in the primary sense of the word" and closes by asking whether Livy and Machiavelli, by their artistry, could say what a "respectable" Roman could not openly say about his country and a citizen of the "respublica Christiana" could not openly say about his faith. Thus the problem of authority arises in concern for the way authors address their readers and points to the way they deal with the demands of citizenship and of religion or faith. It does not take a great leap to move from this to what Strauss earlier posited as the core of Machiavelli, i.e., his comprehensive reflection regarding the fatherland and the soul. In this manner, we come to appreciate that the problem of authority as it emerges in the *Discourses* and Machiavelli’s core are intertwined. Whether we are also to appreciate that Machiavelli’s comprehensive reflection represents a supreme irony or a deliberate self-contradiction is left to us to decide. In any event, Strauss leads us to see that the problem of authority, or the surface difference between "le cose dette" and "le ragioni," is an avenue to Machiavelli’s core. By the same token, we come to see that Machiavelli’s core is somehow connected to what is problematic in his teaching.

30. TM, 40-42. This and the problem of Livy and his characters mentioned sixty-nine paragraphs later (137) at the center of the book are the only isolated uses of "problem"-as opposed to "problem-solving"-that I can find in the book. In the problem of authority passage Strauss reminds us that he spoke of Livy twelve paragraphs earlier. (30)

31. At this point we are reminded of something else that arises in the introduction. This is the possibility that there is a problem inherent in the surface of *Thoughts* that parallels the problem of Machiavelli. Strauss’s treatment of Machiavelli’s treatment of Livy and of authority, for example, raises the question of whether Strauss is wholly candid in his treatment of Machiavelli. It is curious, for example, that the first note in the introduction, and in *Thoughts*, refers us to Machiavelli’s use of Dido and Chiron as instances of his saying “in his own name shocking things which ancient writers had said through the mouths of their characters,” but that Strauss here fails to mention that in both cases Machiavelli virtually reverses the force of the ancient writings. Although Machiavelli employs Dido’s words to demonstrate how rulers of new states must risk a reputation for ruthlessness, in their Virgilian context the words, which are part of Dido’s apology to the Trojans for her behavior, are devised to elicit sympathy rather than exert strength. That is, their purpose is to diminish or remove Dido’s reputation for ruthlessness rather than to encourage it. The case of Chiron is more striking still. Whereas the Machiavellian representation of Chiron emphasizes the beastly, the ancient conception of Chiron is that of a figure of admiration, the wisest and most just of the centaurs. Any thought that Strauss might have forgotten this is erased by his comparison of Machiavelli’s Chiron to Swift’s Houyhnhnms—a modern representation of the ancient conception. On the other hand, by his silence about *The Prince’s* “ingenious” corruption of the Chiron myth, as Bacon describes it, Strauss moves us to
Our sense of the tie between Machiavelli’s core and his problem is furthered by Strauss’s comments, in the final section of the introduction, on the American alternative to Machiavellianism. In effect, he argues that the promise and anti-Machiavellian foundations of America make it the most fitting context in which to deal with Machiavelli. That is, America provides the perspective necessary to appreciate Machiavelli because, as a free regime and a rejoinder to the position that "political greatness is necessarily laid in crime," it allows one to study Machiavelli without having been corrupted by Machiavelli. The free regime, in short, provides the best vantage point for studying the foundations of "contemporary tyranny." Conversely, to understand "Americanism" one needs to understand Machiavellianism, "which is its opposite. Hence, Thoughts may be said to offer an education in American principles as well as in Machiavellianism. Strauss’s praise of America is not unqualified, however, and it is this which adds to our understanding of Machiavelli’s problem. He notes that Machiavelli would argue that American greatness depends on "occasional deviation from the principles of freedom and justice, as they are manifested particularly in Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man, and that Machiavelli "would not hesitate to suggest a mischievous interpretation of the Louisiana Purchase and the fate of the Red Indians," a reference supported by a note to passages in Henry Adams’ History which describe the dubious moral basis of some of the acts whereby consider whether Machiavelli’s outspokenness resides in his repetition of what ancient writers refused to say in their own names or in his perversion of what they do say. This question arises as well in other places in Thoughts. Later, for example, we encounter an argument which suggests that Machiavelli tacitly accepts Aristotle’s explicit description of tyrants. Not only, then, does Thoughts suggest that Machiavelli is explicit where the ancients were silent, but that he is silent where they were explicit. In this regard, it is intriguing that Thoughts references to Chiron are at the end of sixty-nine paragraphs at the center of which Machiavelli’s use of "manifest blunders" and fraud is considered, and that the comment on Aristotelian tyrants occurs in the twenty-sixth footnote to the thirteenth paragraph of chapter 2. See TM, 10, 25-26, 35-36, 301, 302, 78, 309. Cf. Prince, XVII; Aeneid, 1.563-64; Prince, XVIII; Bacon, Advancement of Learning, II, 4.4; TM, 204. Thoughts presentation of Machiavelli’s relationship to his predecessors, therefore, raises the problem of deciding what portion of his inheritance from the ancients Machiavelli accepts and what portion he refuses. What such a decision might entail is also suggested in the introduction. In describing the conditions required for seeing "the true character of Machiavelli’s thought," Strauss says that this cannot be accomplished "unless one recovers for himself and in himself the pre-modern heritage of the western world, both Biblical and classical." (12)The problem that arises here is whether one can consistently regain both the Biblical and classical heritage. Ninety-nine paragraphs later, for example, Strauss emphasizes the "intransigent" Biblical demands for morality and religion. (133)

32. TM, 12-13.
Louisiana became American. This situation, or more accurately the "complication" with regard to the principles of America encountered in facts which point to the Machiavellian contention that a great and glorious society depends for its success on the equivalent of the fratricide in which Rome originated, has a double force. It reveals that there is an American problem, as Strauss calls it, inherent in the tension between Paine's statement of American principles and Adams's on the acts sometimes required to put these principles in place. This problem or complication—Strauss seems to use the terms synonymously—requires, in turn, that we achieve an adequate understanding of the "fundamental issue raised by Machiavelli." Earlier, we saw that Machiavelli's core reflects the problem of authority as it arises in Machiavelli's teaching. Now we see that Machiavelli's fundamental issue reflects the problem of America as it arises in the difference between Paine and Adams.

The bearing of the American problem upon Machiavelli's teaching is, I think, pronounced. In the middle of the series of maxims that illustrate Machiavelli's evil teaching at the beginning of the introduction, for example, we come across the lesson that "not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness." On this basis, Machiavelli would seem to suggest that it is Adams's account of American history rather than Paine's of American principle which guides, or ought to guide, American practice. That is, according to his overt teaching, the problem of choosing between Paine's account of what Americans stand for and Adams's account of how they act is settled by dismissing Paine and following Adams. According to Strauss, however, such an answer to the American problem is inadequate, for it fails to account for the fact that "American reality is inseparable from the American aspiration." For America to compromise or sacrifice its theoretical foundations for the sake of practical needs would entail its losing its "greatness." With this, Machiavelli's teaching that virtue and vice are equally allowable routes to happiness becomes less satisfying than had seemed the case initially. Machiavelli, too, apparently understood that greatness could not wholly be based on "maxims of public and private gangsterism" or else he would not have

33. TM, 13-14. It is interesting that Strauss provides no reference for his suggestion, or moral assessment, regarding "the fate of the Red Indians." This sad fact would seem to have more in common with the fratricide in which Rome was born than the statecraft by which Louisiana became an American territory. Strauss indicates the problematic status of Paine's defense of America by beginning this part of his discussion provisionally; "If we can believe Thomas Paine...." I am indebted to Harvey Mansfield, Jr., for reminding me of this.
been so careful in expressing the problem of authority and the problem of the difference between Livy and his characters. His political teaching, as Strauss describes it in *What Is Political Philosophy?*, amounts to an attempt to do "full justice to all possible requirements of any policy of blood and iron," while remaining "at the same time most favorable to political liberty and the rule of law."\(^{39}\) This aligns Machiavelli’s teaching with the tension between American principles and American actions, which means as well that it is aligned with the old problem of relating theory and practice or philosophy and politics. In such terms, one may say that Machiavelli’s issue-and core-is coextensive with the surface problem of America as posed by Paine and Adams and represents an avenue to the permanent problems, to which Strauss directs us immediately after his discussion of America.

In various ways, then, *Thoughts* indicates the manifestations of Machiavelli’s problem and the way the problem leads us to and beyond Machiavelli. That is, Strauss’s “critical study of Machiavelli’s teaching” and, thereby, of Machiavelli’s problem penetrates to the "core," "heart," and "fundamental issue" of Machiavelli and at the same time reveals the permanent problems that Machiavelli may obscure but cannot eliminate. Thus, the very last Machiavellian opinion Strauss mentions in *Thoughts*-the idea that natural cataclysms are a demonstration of the beneficence of nature because they relieve our apprehension about being destroyed by the results of our own science-has a footnote to passages in Aristotle which question whether even cataclysms dispel the problem of satisfying the requirements of morality and law and the requirements for self-defense, which includes the prudent use of science.\(^{35}\) A most theoretical Machiavellian position, in such terms, is subject to the problem of theory and practice, and thereby philosophy and politics, as it was posed by ancient thinkers. This may stand for Strauss’s final comment on the way the problem of Machiavelli points to the heart of things and to the permanent problems. Moreover, it points to the symmetry of Strauss’s argument insofar as *Thoughts*’ ending bears out the promise of its introduction.

**III**

We have yet to speak directly to another interconnected pair of questions that figure prominently in *Thoughts*. What bearing does
Machiavelli’s stance upon religion have upon his teaching and his problem? To assess this, we may begin with what Strauss, at the end of his discussion of *The Prince* in chapter 2, refers to as the only "fundamental question" about which *The Prince* offers not even a "suspicion" of an answer. Given Machiavelli’s position as an unarmed prophet, how can he “hope for the success of his enormous venture ... if unarmed prophets necessarily fail?” From this, Strauss derives two other questions: how does Machiavelli account for the victory of Christianity, and how will he assure that his new modes and orders be maintained throughout the ages? The “fundamental question” regarding Machiavelli’s enterprise is thereby associated with his appraisal of religion, of political strength, and of the relation of the two. To assure his own success, Machiavelli is led to consider what the victory of Christianity indicates about the possibility or potential for winning the world to his new modes and orders. In such terms, Strauss’s argument on *The Prince* leads us to wonder about whether and how-Machiavelli proposes to transform the bases of previous religious success into the basis for future political success.

*Thoughts’* chapter on the *Discourses* provides an answer of sorts to the question left standing by its chapter on *The Prince*. That is, chapter 3, which ends with the claim that “we have now answered the question of how Machiavelli can hope for the success of his venture,” complements chapter 2 in the same way, according to Strauss, that the *Discourses* complements *The Prince*. In itself, chapter 3 may be said to turn on the *Discourses’* treatment of the relationships of belief to other sources of authority, including reason. That is, it treats the problem-introduced thirty-three paragraphs prior to the beginning of 3-of the relationship of "le cose dette" and "le ragioni," particularly from the perspective of belief, to the end of showing how Machiavelli hopes to succeed in his enormous task. This tends to confirm our suspicion that Machiavelli’s turn from the Great Tradition in its dual aspects to the Enlightenment involves a movement from religion to politics or a transformation of religious authority into political authority. However, despite his acknowledgment that Machiavelli has grounds for hoping that this transformation will succeed, Strauss indicates that it is suspect.

The problematic character of Machiavelli’s attempt to guarantee his "new modes and orders" may be detected in a series of inter-

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36. TM, 84.
related paragraphs in chapter 3. At the peripheries of these paragraphs, Strauss describes how Machiavelli combines arguments from reason with statements of belief when dealing with Rome. In the first case, he speaks of the way Machiavelli establishes the superiority of Rome to Sparta. In coming to this conclusion, we are told, Machiavelli "is compelled to fall back on his own reason" rather than the arguments of "traditional political philosophers," for whom Sparta was the model of political excellence. But Machiavelli's reasoning is apparently inadequate. This is suggested by the fact that "in setting forth the decision [for Rome] Machiavelli says four times 'I believe.'" To defeat the reasoning of ancient political philosophy and to support his own reasoning, Machiavelli calls upon the power of belief. The same process is evident in our second paragraph, but in reverse. In the course of Strauss's account of Machiavelli's teaching on how to instill confidence, we learn that Machiavelli's Romans used religion for this purpose. Thus Machiavelli takes issue with those who mock religion and regard its foundations as "little things." For Machiavelli the 'belief of the people in 'those little things' is the source of the well-being of the commonwealth." But as reason in the earlier paragraph needed an admixture of belief to answer the arguments of traditional political philosophy, now Machiavelli reinforces belief to answer the mockers of religion. As Strauss takes pains to remind us, Machiavelli quotes some words Livy puts in the mouth of Cincinnatus regarding the need to put one's trust in arms and courage rather than the "little things."38 Where reason combined with belief to establish Rome's superiority to Sparta earlier, now belief combines with arms and courage to indicate why Rome was militarily and politically successful.

To win over his readers and establish the Roman model which he would have them imitate, then, Strauss's Machiavelli employs belief and other sources of authority without any apparent sense of conflict or problem. His success in this regard is demonstrated by contemporary scholars' acceptance of the notion that "Machiavelli was a friend of religion because he stressed the useful and indispensable character of religion." In other words, the general view of Machiavelli is that by making religious belief the necessary condition of political stability, he transformed religious strength into political strength and fashioned a satisfactory compromise between religious authority and

38. The arguments are contained in the eleventh and forty-fourth paragraphs of chapter 3 (94-96, 150-52).
other authorities. Strauss, however, questions the adequacy of this view by noting that, among other things, it is indifferent "to the truth of religion" or to the possible validity of belief, i.e., it is indifferent to a matter on which the problem of authority, or "le ragioni" and "le cose dette," turns. Moreover, Strauss raises the possibility that Machiavelli, as opposed to those who are the products of his teaching, was himself not wholly satisfied by his surface answer to the problem of conflicting authorities. In a short paragraph midway between the two we have considered, he speaks of how Machiavelli’s subdued criticism of Livy prepares his "criticism of authority as such." In the course of this, he points to the fact that Machiavelli says in one place that "it is good to reason about everything" and in others that "one ought not to reason about Moses since he was a mere executor of the things which were commanded to him by God," nor about ecclesiastical principalities "since they are exalted and maintained by God." In like manner, we learn that Machiavelli begins the chapter in which he says that "it is good to reason about everything" by saying "I believe," whereas he begins the preceding chapter with "I judge." This "reminds" Strauss of a passage in Seneca’s De Vita Beata which he repeats in possibly the longest direct quotation in Thoughts:

> Everyone prefers to believe rather than to judge. One never judges but always believes regarding the things which are vital. Error transmitted from hand to hand always turns us to and fro and throws us down headlong, and we perish through following examples taken from others. We shall be cured if we were but to secede from the crowd. As it is, however, the people, the defender of its own evil stands firm against reason.

For Strauss, this passage means that we must pay great attention to the kinship between "believing" and "the people" if we are to understand Machiavelli’s thought. 39

Whereas the prevalent scholarly view of Machiavelli dismisses or deprecates any conflict between belief and other authorities in Machiavelli, then, Strauss points to Machiavellian comments that indicate there is a problem here. Whether we begin with Machiavelli’s statements on reasoning about everything but not reasoning about

39. Cf. TM, 12; Social Sciences Encyclopedia, 476 ("But Machiavelli is concerned not with moral justification but with the proper judgment to be made by subjects, and historians. From this technical point of view, religion is important because it binds men to commitments and intensifies their virtue.")

40. TM, 125-26.
things that arise in God, or his uses of "I believe" and "I judge," which Strauss's Seneca shows cannot be done simultaneously, one finds Machiavelli drawing attention to the problem he supposedly resolves in establishing Rome's superiority to Sparta and describing Rome's utilization of religion. Moreover, when Strauss tells us that we must attend to the kinship between the people and believing, which means as well attending to the enmity between the people and reason, he reinforces the sense that Machiavelli's transition from religion or belief to politics is not wholly satisfactory. If Machiavelli prefers the more democratic polity of Rome to the less democratic polity of Sparta, as Strauss puts it two paragraphs later-in the same place that he takes up Machiavelli's challenge to all writers on the wisdom and constancy of the people-yet distinguishes believing from judging as Seneca distinguishes them, then his new world rests on unsteady foundations.¹ When Strauss, in the same paragraph, identifies Machiavelli's contention that the multitude is wiser than a prince with the view that the voice of the people is comparable to the voice of God, he expresses an irony of considerable degree.

The idea that Machiavelli's surface movement from religion to politics is somehow undependable also emerges in other places in Thoughts. The account of Machiavelli's fourfold use of "I believe" in support of the argument that Rome was superior to Sparta, for example, is balanced—at the end of thirteen paragraphs—by an account of his fivefold use of "credo" to destroy Roman authority. Midway between these paragraphs, Strauss then relates how Machiavelli misuses a passage from Livy in a way that exposes his agreement with Livy that a certain Roman was militarily successful against the Tuscans because he acted in a manner that was "repugnant to [Tuscan] belief." From this Strauss draws the conclusion that Machiavelli saw his success as dependent upon the "incredibility of his enterprise," that is, its unbelievability. Finally, as Strauss says that fourteen chapters after Machiavelli demolishes Roman authority he describes Rome as the model of a fraudulent regime, so fourteen paragraphs after Thoughts describes Machiavelli's credulous demolition of Rome it describes Machiavelli's silence about a speech recounted by Livy, wherein a general asks his soldiers whether "they believe that some god will protect them," by which he means them to understand that no god will protect them. This Strauss takes to be a sentiment shared by Machiavelli.² That is, Strauss imitates the method of Machiavelli

¹ TM, 127.
² TM, 116-7, 106-7, 138-41. See, also, 225 ("The foundation of religion is in the last
in drawing attention to the way Machiavelli simultaneously speaks as a believer-in saying "credo"-yet by his silence seems to applaud an action whereby belief is undercut.

In the paragraphs mentioned, then, we find that Machiavelli employs belief to establish Roman authority, employs belief to destroy Roman authority, describes how military-political success demands acting in a manner repugnant to belief or in an "incredible" manner, and silently agrees with an argument whereby men are asked to disclaim their gods or the sources of their belief. This confusing set of lessons has the effect of making us wonder whether Machiavelli’s success, as he envisaged it, depends on the prudent use of belief-or of propaganda-or whether, in a deeper sense, it depends on a kind of destruction of belief. To say "I believe" and "credo" in support of contradictory positions means that belief cannot be trusted as an authority, at least if we are troubled by men speaking out of both sides of their mouths. Moreover, Machiavelli’s descriptions of an enterprise that succeeds because it is incredible and a military policy that depends on separating one’s troops from their beliefs do not speak well for a dependence upon belief for either military or political security.

This reminds us of two places in Thoughts where Strauss states his own belief in the first person singular—the only such occurrences in the book insofar as I can determine. The first appears in a passage we have already touched upon. In the context of examining Machiavelli’s challenge to all writers—which occurs in the middle paragraph of chapter 3 and is midway between the paragraphs in which Machiavelli demolishes Roman authority in the words of belief and silently acquiesces to a view that sets aside belief in the beneficence of the gods-Strauss says "it is no accident, I believe, that the most shocking or the most ‘Machiavellian’ passage" of the Florentine Histories is the inflammatory speech of a Florentine plebeian to the Florentine plebs during the Ciompi revolt in 1378. In the speech, the plebeian leader exhorts his audience, which was fearful of being punished for its acts of arson and robbery, "to double the evils they had committed and to multiply the arson and robberies" according to the familiar idea that small faults are punished and great ones rewarded. Although Strauss describes this speech at length—with some rearrangement—it is not immediately clear why he considers it so shock-

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43. TM, 127.
ing. The idea that large vices are rewarded while small ones are punished is certainly no more shocking in the plebeian leader’s mouth than, let us say, in the mouth of Thrasymachus in the *Republic.* The same is true of other things the leader says. In telling his audience, for example, that wealth and power are the result of force and fraud, he merely repeats a not uncommon view of the upper class. In effect, he urges his listeners to act as they think their rulers have always acted. Similarly, when he tells the plebs not to be frightened by the ancient blood of their adversaries, for all men had the same beginning and by nature are equal, he repeats an argument that had earlier been made by Italians of no less stature than Dante. Other statements of the leader are more disturbing. Without exhausting the list, we may call attention to his position that the multitude should not be frightened by conscience, for its immediate fear of prison and hunger is more compelling than its fear of hell, and that God and nature establish matters such that desirable things can be acquired by evil acts rather than good ones. In the one case, this is part of what Strauss will later call Machiavelli’s destructive analysis of the “phenomenon known to us as conscience.” In the other, we are led to the idea that God is essentially unjust.” It remains, however, that Strauss does not expressly tell us why he believes that Machiavelli’s restatement of the plebeian leader’s speech is so shocking.

To help explain this, I think, it is useful to consider the plebeian leader’s speech in the context of Strauss’s other first person statement of belief. The plebeian leader demonstrates the people’s potential for irreligion and immorality, despite the fact that, as Strauss says, the people in Machiavelli’s system are “the repository of morality” and “the repository of religion.” Two paragraphs later Strauss asserts his belief in the “truth” that “the Bible sets forth the demands of morality and religion in their purest and most intransigent form.” This tends to set the people, who are simultaneously the repository of morality and religion and the source of potentially great evil, against the Bible. The problem here is that according to Machiavelli, or Strauss’s account of Machiavelli, the people have become powerful precisely because of what is inherent in the Bible, i.e., it is the Bible and what it represents that allow Machiavelli to depart from the “aristocratic premise that

44. TM, 127-31, 148-49. The first “I believe” occurs in the thirtieth of the fifty-nine paragraphs of chapter 3. In the next paragraph, Strauss also says that the plebeian leader encourages the plebs not to be frightened by conscience. Strauss says “I do not believe” in the thirtieth paragraph of chapter 1. (26)
informed classical political philosophy.\textsuperscript{45} Thus the multitude whose 
Machiavellian status is a reflection of the Biblical teaching becomes a 
potential reproach, if Machiavelli’s plebeian leader is successful, to 
the moral and religious demands of the Bible. Coupling Strauss’s 
statements on belief, we confront the dilemma of a Bible which pro-
vides support for a way of politics which is potentially an affront to 
the Bible.

Pre-Machiavellian religion avoids this problem by mitigating its 
support for the people with an acceptance of the "aristocratic prem-
ise" at least insofar as it applies to politics. The appeal to the mul-
titude or the humble of premodern Christianity, in other words, is 
mitigated by an acceptance of nondemocratic politics.\textsuperscript{46} But this is 
not the case for Machiavelli. He retains Christianity’s appeal to the 
humble and foregoes the "aristocratic premise." This may appear 
consistent, but it is also potentially devastating to the people and the 
Bible. What is "most shocking" about the statement in the Histories is 
the way it empowers the people at the same time that it endangers 
their Biblical foundation or the foundation of the popular premise.

Machiavelli shocks not merely because he challenges religion and 
morality. He shocks because in urging the people to irreligion and im-
morality he urges the people to place at risk the very source of their 
strength, the Bible. Machiavelli, or at least the plebeian leader, in 
short, places the people on a collision course with that which made 
them strong in the first place. For the people to follow Machiavelli, 
which they will if he is successful in his enormous venture, would be 
suicidal. This is a measure of Machiavelli’s boldness. It is a measure of 
Strauss’s care and moderation that by opposing Machiavelli in the

\textsuperscript{45} TM, 133. In the paragraph between the two in which Strauss says “I believe,” he 
describes how Machiavelli “on different occasions appeals to different prin-
ciples ... which contradict each other: the contradiction between them may lead some 
readers to the true principles in their nakedness.” (132) He then lists a series of six 
Machiavellian arguments wherein appeals to one principle are mitigated by appeals to 
another, and refers us in a note to Machiavelli’s analysis of religion and his condemna-
tion of tyranny, and to his criticism of Christianity and his praise of (democratic) 
repulics. Thirty-nine paragraphs later he describes Christianity’s giving the humble 
strength, thereby enabling them to “inherit the Roman empire and whatever remained 
of the classical arts and sciences.” (186)

\textsuperscript{46} The extremes to which Machiavelli went in recounting this position are illustrated 
by Machiavelli’s “extraordinary and shocking suggestion”—which appears in his ap-
plication to the tyrant David of an expression which the New Testament applies to 
God—that God is a tyrant. TM, 49, Cf. 187-88.
name of belief, he takes the side of the Bible, and ultimately the people, in opposing Machiavelli.

Machiavelli’s position on the people and religion allows a rephrasing of the question left open by The Prince. How does Machiavelli propose to assure the success of his “enormous venture” if he questions the aristocratic premise that informed classical political philosophy at the same time that he jeopardizes the Biblical moral and religious tradition which provides the ultimate support for the popular premise? We recall the plebeian leader’s argument that ancient blood is no argument for authority since all men have common descent from the same parents. Similarly, how does Machiavelli propose to maintain a regime if, on the one hand, he can acknowledge the undependability of the people and the powers of belief and, on the other, retain a popular bias that, to echo Strauss’s Seneca, makes it perilous to place one’s confidence in reason or judgment? To put it more simply, perhaps, how does he propose to retain classical political philosophy’s suspicion of the people and dispose of its aristocratic premise and at the same time retain the Bible’s sympathy to the people and dispose of its bias in favor of belief?

We cannot answer this question, but we suspect that Strauss leads us towards an answer in his final chapter on Machiavelli’s teaching. As already noted, chapter 4 is divided-literally-into two principal themes, religion and morality. Its central paragraph provides a transition between these themes. Thirteen paragraphs prior to this paragraph in the midst of the treatment of religion, Strauss concludes a discussion of Machiavellian Fortuna by drawing attention to a passage in which Machiavelli “explicitly urges all readers to hope, i.e., to abandon themselves to the passion opposite to fear.” Thirteen paragraphs after the central paragraph in the midst of the discussion of morality, Strauss concludes a discussion of Machiavellian necessity by stating the Machiavellian thesis that “men living in society can be made good and kept good only by such compulsion causing fear as originates in other men.” In this manner, Thoughts opens the way to the question of whether Machiavelli’s new modes and orders, and thereby modern thought generally, depend upon the coexistence of the opposed passions of hope and fear, the one borrowed from the religious tradition, the other from the moral tradition. By the same token, it leads us to wonder whether Machiavelli and “his great successors,” can dispose as easily as it seems of the Great Tradition because the surface problem that emerges in the alternation between fear and hope (how is one to bear the burden of a life characterized by both?) is one of the
problems that may be said to have divided premodern religion, with its appeals to the multitude and its emphasis on hope from some premodern political philosophy, with its aristocratic bias and its emphasis upon fearlessness in its various guises."

Strauss's treatment of Machiavelli on religion and belief, then, suggests the existence of a tension in modern thought between hopefulness and fearfulness. This, I think, may be Strauss's version of the way the permanent problems re-emerge in modern thought. If so, it suggests the possibility that Machiavellianism rests on fragile foundations and must eventually fail. This is not to say what is to replace it. For suggestions as to that, I would think that Strauss's comments on the second wave of modernity are critical. On the other hand, the potential failure of Machiavellianism makes all the more important Strauss's praise of America and his pointing to the fact that America is the most powerful practical alternative to Machiavelli's teaching.

IV

Further intimations of the character of Machiavelli's problem and its intersection with the permanent problems may be found in chapter 4, which represents a distillation of the specific arguments of the earlier chapters. It begins, for example, by reiterating the difficulties encountered in reading Machiavelli and then readdresses the questions posed by the core of Machiavelli, i.e., Machiavelli's assertion that he loved his fatherland more than his soul. Because of this, Strauss says, "many writers" have called Machiavelli a pagan, meaning that he forgot or denied the truths of Christianity in favor of the worldly glory of pagan Rome. Strauss challenges this opinion, just as thirty-two paragraphs earlier Machiavelli had been seen to challenge "all writers." In the course of doing so, Strauss reflects upon the character of paganism, of the "wise of the world," and of Savanarola's charges against the falasifa or Averroists. Machiavelli's comprehensive reflection upon the status of the fatherland and the soul-first mentioned 132 paragraphs earlier in the introduction—is thus extended in chapter 4 to greater matters. Upon the basis of Strauss's

47. TM, 215, 231-32, 249, 298. Cf. 157, on the Biblical combination of fear and love. A hint as to the intention of the last chapter may be provided by its eighty-seven paragraphs, which are two more paragraphs than those of the combined chapters on *The Prince* and *Discourses*. We recall that if the proems are included, the *Discourses* contains two more chapters (144) than Livy. Chapters 1 and 4 combined contain thirty-nine more paragraphs than chapters 2 and 3 combined.
detailed arguments in chapters 1-3, we may say, we are now prepared to consider how Machiavelli's core touches upon the problems—the permanent problems—over which the "wise of the world" and the believers divide.\(^\text{48}\)

One further set of examples will serve to suggest how Strauss expands his argument in chapter 4. For Strauss's Machiavelli, the division between the "wise of the world" and the Savonarolas is, at one level, part of a moral dilemma consequent to the problem of Machiavelli. In urging a policy of "blood and iron" in pursuit of freedom and happiness or, more strictly, in urging a prudent use of virtue and vice toward the end of happiness, Machiavelli seems to adopt conflicting positions identifiable in ancient thought. As Strauss puts it in chapter 4, reopening the subject raised in chapter 3, Machiavelli's attack upon "all writers" in the Discourses is directed against the "traditional contempt for the multitude." This attack is tied, in turn, to a moral doctrine whereby sympathy for the multitude leads to a variety of virtue that answers "to the needs of society" and "has no other source than the needs of society."\(^\text{49}\) Thus virtue becomes the instrument of "the multitude" or answers to the needs of the multitude, and an argument for the "prudent" use of virtue and vice becomes socially acceptable.

Contrarily, however, Machiavelli sometimes sides, or seems to side, with the alternative point of view or the old-fashioned aristocratic premise. In chapter 3, Strauss notes that notwithstanding Machiavelli's adoption of the plebeian point of view, "one may say with equal right that he views the plebs to some extent from the patrician point of view," the view associated with Seneca. In chapter 4 he goes even further. Here we discover that Machiavelli sides with Aristotle and "explicitly rejects the opinion of `the many − to the end of "recognizing free will and therewith ... prudence and virtue" as powerful in our lives. As opposed, in other words, to the many who hold that chance and God govern all things, Machiavelli gives us a world governed, at least in significant part, by free will and virtue, a world that, in keeping with classical thought, is not given to the idea that virtue is subject to "the needs of society." Machiavelli simultaneously sides with and against the multitude, and with and against the philosophers. His teaching on the goodness of the people and the common good, recounted at the center of the thirty-three paragraphs

48. TM, 174-80.
49. TM, 294.
whose peripheries respectively identify Machiavelli with the multitude and with the philosophers, thus comes to sight in the context of the differences between the philosophers, the multitude, and the spokesmen of the multitude."

Chapter 4 indicates what is at stake here when it describes Machiavelli’s approach to one of the fundamental issues dividing the falasifa from the Savonarolas. Its twentieth paragraph provides a more complete description of a matter initially raised in the twentieth paragraph of chapter 1: "the grave issue of the eternity of the world . . . the issue of whether the visible universe exists from eternity to eternity or whether it had a beginning." In the earlier case, Strauss asks that we consider whether Machiavelli might have taken "the side of Aristotle as over against the Bible," a question justified by the fact that when Machiavelli raises the issue in the Discourses, he disposes of it by indicating the lack of force of an argument against Aristotle’s position. In the later case, Strauss describes a series of Machiavellian statements bearing on the question of "the beginning of the world" and concludes that they describe not the beginning of the world as such but "of the beginning of the world’s present epoch which began after an almost complete destruction of the human race." Thus, we are left with the immediate or surface impression that Machiavelli sides with the falasifa on the essential question of the eternality of the visible universe, an impression reinforced by the next paragraph, where Machiavelli is said to draw our attention to "those philosophers who taught that the world is eternal" and at the end of thirty-three paragraphs when, as noted, Machiavelli rejects the opinion of "many" that "chance and God govern all things of the world.

Midway between his description of Machiavelli’s agreement with the falasifa and rejection of the opinion of the "many," however, Strauss gives an account of another side of Machiavelli. Recognizing that "we have stated the reasons which may induce one to think that Machiavelli’s cosmological premises were Aristotelian," Strauss undertakes to explain why they are not Aristotelian. The explanation includes a discussion of chance and concludes with statements that Machiavelli’s "analysis of morality will prove to be incompatible with a teleological cosmology" and that his fundamental thought eventuates in an understanding of chance "as a non-teleological necessity

50. TM, 244-45, 262-64.
51. TM, 31-32, 201-2.
which leaves room for choice and prudence and therefore for chance understood as the cause of simply unforeseeable accidents. In moving from his statement that he is going to clarify Machiavelli’s Aristotelianism to his statement of Machiavelli’s non-teleological bias, Strauss leads us through a mare’s nest of extraordinary issues, including the distinction between "simple and mixed bodies." But more to the point with regard to our interest, if at the peripheries of this particular sequence of paragraphs he demonstrates a certain philosophical kinship between Machiavelli and Aristotle, at the center of the sequence he discloses that Machiavellian virtue is based on a disagreement with Aristotle concerning matters that go very much beyond but are very much connected to virtue and politics. In addition, he forces us to confront Machiavelli’s confrontation with the problems that surround the issue of the nature of the universe. We have moved from Machiavelli’s problem, reflected in his stance on the good of the people and the common good, to the problem of the division between the falasifa and the Savanarolas, to the problem of the eternality of the universe. The problem at the surface of Machiavelli, represented in this instance by his argument upon virtue and goodness, has led us to the heart of Machiavelli. At the same time, through Machiavelli’s arguments on morality and cosmology, the old problem of the relation of politics and philosophy re-emerges.

This may stand as our final comment on Strauss’s achievement as a teacher. As promised, his study of Machiavelli leads to the recovery of the permanent problems. To paraphrase the last words of Thoughts, a journey through the book is edifying even as its style defeats attempts to be edifying.

University of California, Davis

LARRY PETERMAN

52. TM, 202-3, 244-45, 221-23. On Strauss’s position regarding the eternality of the universe, see his letter to Helmut Kuhn in the Independent Journal of Philosophy, 2 (1980), 27-31.

53. TM, 299. We are also to return to the “fundamental experiences.” What is meant by this is unclear. It would seem that “the fundamental experiences” are to be set against that “which has been rendered incredible by the experiences of the last centuries.” See, above, n. 42.