Was Machiavelli a "Spiritual Realist"?

In order to indicate what I mean by the term "Spiritual Realist" I contrast said approach to politics with two other orientations: Vulgar or Unspiritual or "Crackpot" Realism and (More of Less Apocalyptic) Idealism. Using Plato's Parable of the Cave, I compare the Vulgar Realists -- whose ultimate answer to political problems is to build more prisons--to prisoners themselves, shackled to the floor on the Right side of the Cave. The Idealists, --whose ultimate answer to political problems is "education, education, education" (without knowing what education is) are the prisoners shackled on the Left side. The Spiritual Realist is the ex-prisoner who has been helped to accomplish the *periagoge* and who returns to work on improving the lighting. The spiritual realist is not popular, because every now and then he or she tries to persuade the prisoners that they are dealing in the world of appearance rather than reality, and most of them do not like to hear this, but nonetheless the spiritual realist continues to work in the Cave (i.e. the world) and to try to patch it up, keep it in repair, all the while knowing that

There is only the trying
The rest is not *our* business. (T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets)*

Now, if I were a lawyer, I could make a case for the proposition that Machiavelli was a Spiritual Realist. My case would be built on the entire Machiavellian text and not on what I call the Selective Textualism of some interpreters, who confine themselves to the *Prince* and the *Discourses* and even then swoop down on certain portions thereof and neglect to consider others (or so it seems to me). Furthermore, I could even have cited Eric Voegelin, who does appear, more or less, to call Machiavelli a Spiritual Realist. But because I am not a lawyer, and because I think that the early Voegelin's theory of spiritual realism needs revision in the light of the insights of the later Voegelin, --*il maestro di color che sanno* having left us some theoretical work to do--I do
not chose to make that case.

Now, of the three approaches indicated above I argue that if you had to chose one of them to describe Machiavelli, it would NOT be the one of which most political scientists (unlike at least some historians with more feel for context like F. Gilbert and H. Baron) are fond. No, my friends, remember this: MACHIAVELLI WAS NOT A VULGAR REALIST. Indeed, like a giant vacuum cleaner, Eric Voegelin in his *History of Political Ideas* sweeps up the debris deposited by the majority of political scientists by showing that the Florentine Secretary was "a healthy and honest figure"--at least compared to the contractualists and their "swindle of consent," a man who did NOT-- and I repeat NOT-- teach that there are two moralities, one for private and the other for political life, a man who was NOT a mere technician, NOT a cynic, NOT a nihilist, NOT a reincarnated Callicles on his knees before the god Power, did NOT think "might is right," and of course, did NOT separate politics from ethics. And, had he written on Machiavelli after the appearance of Leo Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli,* Voegelin could only have registered his strong objection to the former's contention in his Preface that Machiavelli was a "teacher of evil," a view according to Strauss and Harvey Mansfield from which we are to

"ascend." But why go down into THAT cave in the first place? It is hard to forgive Leo Strauss for writing those words, words which are contradicted by the book itself.

Indeed, if one had to pick one of the three approaches to describe Machiavelli, it would be--and this may surprise you--IDEALISM. Machiavelli is indeed the founder of modernity, and what is modernity if it be not idealistic? Innerworldly "progress" finally struggles to the fore despite the hold of the cyclical view of history on his consciousness, and in what does that progress consist? Populism, of course, of an uncritical kind, and fierce anatagonism towards obstacles to the victory of the new Order of Horizontalism, replacing the Order of Verticality. And so he caricatures the Roman Catholic Church almost in a manner worthy of Luther, brands the nobles who live in their castles "parasites," condemns humanist intellectuals who may be more preoccupied with scholarship than with the new modes and orders, and of course castigates "the Turk" (a synonym for Islam), as the "despotic" and "Asian" enemy of an emerging, modem, eventually "republican" "Europe." So, there is a strong idealistic component in Machiavelli, as his contemporary Guicciardini correctly discerned.

But --- But--Idealism is not all there is in Machiavelli: there is indeed a strain of Spiritual Realism in him, PROVIDED WE DO NOT ENGAGE IN

SELECTIVE TEXTUALISM, for the Apocalyptic idealism of Prince, ch. 26, where manna from Heaven is to descend on the new, liberating leader of Italy and which is entitled "An Exhortation to Liberate Italy from Barbarian Domination that Stinks in Our Nostrils"--that "Exhortation" is balanced by Machiavelli's other and less well-known Exhortation: *"The Exhortation to Repentance,"* wherein he quotes lines from Petrarch that brilliantly encapsulate the meaning of Spiritual Realism:

And to repent, and understand clearly That all that pleases the world is but a brief dream.

So, in answer to the question posed in my title, "Was Machiavelli a Spiritual Realist?" I conclude that a clear answer cannot be given, that Machiavelli will always be a Croceian enigma, because there are elements of all three approaches in his legacy. Those who unimaginatively interpret Machiavelli as a Vulgar Realist can always point to the literal meaning of some of his statements, and it has to be admitted that the Florentine's manner of writing left itself open to the charge that the author should have taken into account the fact that many readers in future generations would read him literally and out of context. But perhaps there is more than meets my eye on this score, and so I conclude by asking "Why are there elements of all three approaches in Machiavelli?" My answer, and here I draw on Eric Voegelin, is that he was confused precisely because he lived through the "Age of Confusion," in which the foundations of Western civilization were crumbling all around him. But, let us remember, that in his magnificent self-awareness Machiavelli's greatness, even today, shines through the mist of his confusion and conflicting motivations.###

Summary of Paper (formerly to be read at the meeting).

When I began to investigate the question of whether Machiavelli was a 11spiritual realist," I did

not realize that asking this question opens the widest window I know of on the Florentine Secretary's complexity. I think you will see why that is so when I give you my answer to the question. First, however, I must attempt in brief compass to define "spiritual realism," a term invented but insufficiently explained by Eric Voegelin. I think that my definition is faithful to Voegelin, the entire Voegelin, that is.

Let me say at the outset that it is difficult in 12 minutes to give a summary of what I mean by spiritual realism without it sounding like a caricature of same.

But to anticipate obvious objections: It is not a reactionary concept and it is not meant to denigrate the importance of working in the world, the political world of the Cave. We all need to work to improve the lighting, as it were, and if we are shackled to the Right side of the Cave we need to use the concept of spiritual realism as a leaven to our tendency to solve all problems with force, prisons, armies, etc. If we are shackled to the Left, we need to use said concept to cast doubt on the proposition that all the ills of the world can be solved by "education, education, education," to quote Tony Blair, or perhaps George W. Bush. In a word, spiritual realism teaches us that "There is only the trying. The rest is not our business. "(T. S. Eliot)

I shall not here attempt a recapitulation of Part I of my paper, entitled rather ponderously a "Terminological Excursus. " Let me just say here that Voegelin ceased to use the term "spiritual realism" in the early 50's, and there is no mention of it in the *New Science of Politics* or in *Order and History. I* think this is a pity, for I wish that he had revised it in the light of his theophanic experiences that constitute a break in his thought, not an entire break to be sure, but a break nonetheless. So, il *maestro di color che sanno,* if so I may here refer to him in a panel organized by a society bearing his name, left us some theoretical work to do.

I think that the key to Voegelin's deeper understanding of spiritual realism is to be found in the Plato section of volume III of *Order and History,* which I had the privilege to introduce and edit in the new, recently published version thereof, which constitutes vol. 16 of his *Collected Works,* brought out in a beautiful edition by the University of Missouri Press. There, Voegelin speaks of the tension in Plato's thought between his "love of being" and his "love of existence," and it is this tension which I contend constitutes the core of spiritual realism properly understood.

From the perspective of eternal being, human actions are of little worth, as acknowledged by Petrarch in a sonnet quoted by none other than Machiavelli himself at the end of his neglected work, "The Exhortation to Repentance":

And repent and understand clearly That all that pleases the world is but a brief dream.

A shadow of tragedy, then, is cast over human affairs from the perspective of the spiritual realist. To revert to Plato, we humans are in the Cave and most of us will remain there, at least for most of the time. We will pursue appearances **r**ather than truth and our lives will be consumed by the perpetual and fruitless chase after the mutable good, mistaking it in its various permutations (bodily pleasure, greed, the lust for power) for the immutable Good, the Agathon.

Spiritual realism will probably never be popular, because it entails our acknowledging that we

are in the Cave, which requires humility. We need not always remain there, however, for help is available, in that we can respond to the pull of the golden cord of reason or of preventive grace and seek to emulate the spiritual athletes who have broken out of their imprisonment, insofar as it is possible to do here below in the metaxy of existence, at least for moments, here and there.

"The love of being is constantly drawing Plato away from the Cave toward fulfillment in death beyond time and the world, but the love of existence brings him back to shed indirect light on the problems encountered in the *metaxy* or Between of human life ... Plato knew that there was no way to the life of the spirit that did not run through the body, and so existence in the pride of life was something to be grasped and savored, for rising above the rhythms of lasting and passing there surges the thing called man."(p.6 of Introduction by DG)

To speak more practically, for the spiritual realist, the world--defined by the O.E.D. as "human existence"--will always remain the world, and, contrary to modem gnosticism or idealism, it is not perfectible. To quote from the then Monk Khantipalo's brilliant study of Theravada Buddhism as practiced in Thailand:

"The world has always been like this: some factors advancing, some declining, for this state of things is never stable. Those who work in the world can, at best, keep it patched up and try to prevent deterioration." fLaurence Khantipalo Mills, *Buddhism Explained* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 1999), 63.1

Now, if I were a lawyer, and Machiavelli's life depended on it, I could make a convincing case for the proposition that although certainly no Plato, Machiavelli deserves to be ranked as a "spiritual realist." There is indeed a sense of tragedy cast over Machiavelli's writing, most explicity revealed of course in the "Exhortation to Repentence" and in his "Tercets on Ambition." Chapter 18 of *The Prince* tells us how the many judge by appearances, while the few (who do not) "have no place to stand" in a world wherein the many call the tune. However, not being a lawyer, I do not chose to make that case. And I disagree with the early Voegelin, (who does call Machiavelli a spiritual realist, incidentally) on grounds that had Voegelin revised this concept in the light of his analysis of "the leap in being," he would no longer have held Machiavelli to be worthy of this designation.

In my paper I distinguish between three approaches to politics: spiritual realism, unspiritual or "crackpot" realism, and (potentially) apocalyptic "idealism." Here let me explain that each of these three approaches attempts to answer the question "What does it mean to be 'realistic' in politics?" There are today two main pre-analytic answers to this question found in the Cave of everyday politics, one from the Right and the other from the Left. The Right contends that realism in politics entails suspicion of immigrants and foreigners, reliance on more prisons and police and larger armies and navies, and toughness on "law and order." The Left regards the Right as "crackpot realists," or cynics and believes that the problems of the human condition may be solved through ever increasing public expenditure on health, education, and social welfare, as well as through promoting a multi-cultural society. Spiritual realists seek to indicate a third way between the Scylla of naked power and the Charybdis of innocence about the reality of evil in human affairs. In brief, spiritual realism rejects both the traditionalist Right and the apocalyptic Left, without occupying a mushy center-ground between the two. I conclude that there are

elements of all three approaches in Machiavelli, although I agree with Voegelin in the Machiavelli chapters in his *History of Political Ideas* that it is *least* likely that he was "Machiavellian," or a "teacher of evil" as the legend has it. It must be said, however, that the great Florentine's manner of writing left himself vulnerable to that charge, because he should have known that most readers would read him literally and out of context, or rather out of the many contexts in which he placed himself.

Why are there elements of all three approaches and why does Machiavelli remain today an "enigma that can never be resolved" (Croce)? Because he was confused. Why was he confused? Because he lived in what Voegelin himself called "The Age of Confusion," in which the foundations of Western civilization were crumbling around him.

I argue further that, if one had to pick one of the three adumbrated approaches to politics most faithfully to represent Machiavelli's thought, it would be the opposite of the one with which he is traditionally identified: i.e., it would be *idealism*, with touches of apocalyptic fervor as shown most clearly in his other "Exhortation," namely Chapter 26 of The Prince where manna from heaven is to descend upon the new, liberating leader who will free Italy from the "barbarian" domination that "stinks in our nostrils." And I contend that at bottom Machiavelli was the first great constructor of the democratic ethos, and indeed, (to agree with Leo Strauss), the first founder of modernity. (Having mentioned Professor Strauss, who wrote one of the greatest books on Machiavelli, I find it hard to forgive him for professing agreement with the vilificatory tradition that judged the great Florentine a "teacher of evil." I do not think that Strauss's book itself supports that charge, nor is it sufficient to argue as has another author of major and serious works on Machiavelli, Harvey Mansfield, that one "must ascend" from Strauss's judgment. But, as an eminent member of our panel, Dr. Chaiwat Satha-Anand, has acutely observed in another place, "Why should we be put in a position where we have to "ascend" at all?)

Voegelin, to his credit, destroyed the conventional image of Machiavelli of which political scientists tend to be so enamored. He pronounces Machiavelli "a healthy and honest figure, most certainly preferable as a man to the contractualists (above all Locke) who try to cover the reality of power underneath ... the immoral swindle of consent." Voegelin's Machiavelli called a spade a spade, had no theory of a "double morality," was no mere technician or "expert" adviser on how to achieve power as an end in itself, was not a nihilist, or a cynic, or a Callicles-like worshipper of "might is right" and did not separate politics from ethics. He was not the founder of a political science that teaches "who gets what, when, and how," to quote Harold Lasswell. Like a gigantic vacuum cleaner, Eric Voegelin sucks up and disposes of all the simple-minded, fallacious, and ignorant interpretations of Machiavelli so prominent in the literature of our discipline. (In this respect it must be said that historians like Hans Baron have been vastly superior, for they recognize Machiavelli's thought as a tissue of many "layers" and "conflicting emotional motivations.")

As previously stated, I do not agree with everything Voegelin said about Machiavelli, and to my disagreement that he deserves to be grouped with the spiritual realists I would add that Niccol6 was at heart not a "pagan" espousing the myth of nature and cosmic cycles, either, although such seeming espousal, *e pluribus unum*, maybe found in places in his work. Furthermore, in another place, Voegelin refers to Machiavelli as one of a group of so-called "secular" realists, when to

me there is nothing "secular" about Machiavelli. (Perhaps Voegelin was using the German meaning of "secular" which is *weldich* (literally, "worldly") when of course in English "secular" sounds like the ACLU at least in the American context, dogmatically fighting for the "separation" of Church and State. One problem is that Eric Voegelin seems to have been unaware of the "Exhortation to Repentance." Machiavelli was a strange and confused sort of Christian, to be sure, but that he believed himself to be such--a Christian of a reforming sort, that is--, I think is clear. I know that I am in a minority in this respect, however. But, before you dismiss my claim, read Machiavelli in his own words in Sebastian De Grazia's *Machiavelli in Hell; you* may be surprised how often he speaks of God and in his familiar letters of Christ--and not always in a heterodox sense.

And so, my fellow students of the greatest political philosopher of the Twentieth Century, let us push ahead, building on Voegelin's insights, and further develop a concept which in him is insufficiently theorized: spiritual realism. To do so we shall, like Plato, have to combine the love of eternal being with the love of existence. We shall also need to delve into the riches of Israelite revelation, Christianity, Islam, Theravada Buddhism, and Confucianism for equivalent expressions of the truth of Spiritual Realism. And let us continue to investigate Niccol6 Machiavelli, whose greatness shines through his confusion and conflicting motivations.

(The Paper itself Follows the above Summary)

I. Terminological Excursus

As I have recently wrestled with the term "spiritual realism," I have found it to be one of Eric Voegelin's more opaque concepts. In *Political Philosophy and the Open Society,* a book I published in 1982, 1 used "spiritual realism" as a necessary third position between what C. Wright Mills wittily called "crackpot realism" and political "idealism." In other words, spiritual realism was the true, un-crackpot form of realism, which held in balance both the power drive and the aspirational side of the consciousness of humans as political actors. I I later found that Ellis Sandoz had understood the concept in more or less the same way, independently of my interpretation. As for my first encounter with the term itself, no doubt I first read it somewhere in Voegelin's manuscripts during the 1970's and it stuck in my mind. Reading the recently published volume 25 of Voegelin's *Collected Works,* with Juergen Gebhardt's Introduction, I was at first puzzled, because, judging by Gebhardt's account, in this, the last completed section of the *History of Political Ideas,* Voegelin at times employed "spiritual realism" to apply more narrowly to a group of so-called "secular" modem thinkers, including Machiavelli, Schelling, and Nietzsche. I now see, however, after reading the Introduction to the whole *History of Political Ideas* by Thomas Hollweck and Ellis Sandoz, that in the *History* Voegelin understood the term "spiritual realism" to reach back at least to Dante, and that he saw the "secular" realists to include Bodin, Hobbes, Vico, and Spinoza in addition to the trio mentioned above where Machiavelli becomes somehow also a "secular" thinker.2

Gebhardt suggests that part of the difficulty in understanding Voegelin's meaning of the term "spiritual realism" has to do with the fact that in German, which of course was Voegelin's first language, the word *Geist* means both "spirit" and "mind." In any case, to Gebhardt, it seems that part of the meaning of spiritual realism for the early Voegelin was this: a current of thought

whose purpose was to protect *Geist* from the onslaught of phenomenalistic reductionsirn and ideological fanaticism in modernity. Gebhardt even suggests that for Voegelin of the unfinished *History of Political Ideas* there were *two* modernities, one that of the "secular" spiritual realists including Spinoza, Bodin, Vico, and and Hobbes, in addition to the already mentioned Machiavelli, Schelling, and Nietzsche, and the other modernity which we know from its ideological evasion through the manufacturing of "consent," its exhaltation of violence, and in general its anti-spiritual reductionism, among other depressing features.3

Be that as it may, it is clear that Voegelin did not always restrict the term spiritual realism to the modem period. Even in volume 25, for example, he employs the term "realist" in a way that would apply to any political philosopher, modem or premodern, from Plato onwards who was open to the entire range of reality and did not entertain chiliastic expectations about the possibilities of world-immanent collective action.4 And so I am asking the question "Does Machiavelli deserve to be ranked among the spiritual realists in the same way as a Plato, or an Augustine, or an Aquinas?" , or to put it more precisely: "Of the three categories--'Vulgar Realist,' 'Idealist,' or 'Spiritual Realist'-- under which heading can we say that Machiavelli properly belongs?"

I recognize, however, that my approach still leaves Voegelin's use of the term "spiritual realism" something of a puzzle. (And I must candidly add that not all of the responsibility for that rests on the shoulders of this or any interpreter, for the concept is used in varying ways in various places in the Voegelinian corpus.) Recently Professor Ellis Sandoz in a personal communication has offered the following helpful clarification: "The criterion seems to be an assessment of the degree to which the foundation of political order in light of the truth of transcendence is ... capable of being embodied in the contemporary world of the respective thinker. The philosophy of order {of the spiritual realist} ... must then be articulated with an awareness of the Ground, matched by an awareness of its feebleness in orienting politics and history under conditions of the world, sinful mankind, rebellion, and the like. This discrepancy engenders a tragic sense in the philosopher, who although he lives by hope (even "hopeless hope" as Voegelin has put it) reconciles himself to imperfection and mutilated reality." (Sandoz, 8 January, 2000.)

Reflecting on how I came to use the concept "spiritual realism" in my *Open Society* book, I now realize that I was influenced in its use by the Eric Voegelin of *Order and History* rather than the earlier Voegelin of the *History of Poltical Ideas.* Above all, Voegelin's interpretation of the Platonic symbol *metaxy* (or the "Between" of human life) was crucial in formulating my understanding of spiritual realism. Also, in the English translation by Gerhard Niemeyer of Voegelin's 1966 work *Anamnesis,* Voegelin added an Appendix containing a diagram which charts human existence occurring between two contrasting poles, the Divine Nous and the Apeirontic Depth. If we move up the layers of reality from the Depth to the Nous we proceed from inorganic nature, vegetative nature, animal nature, the passions of the psyche, the noetic psyche and finally the Nous. T11us, the structure of political reality occurs *"between"* the bottom pole of "bodily foundation" and the top pole of "spiritual formation." So, in my view the spiritual realist is any thinker whose language symbols point toward the entire existential range of the reality in which man participates and which avoids the perils of reductionism, or determining the higher strata by the lower. At the same time the spiritual realist does not see the spirit as disembodied and is vividly aware both of the downward "pull" of the instincts and passions and

the "counterpull" of the forces of spiritual attraction. (EV, CW 12, 287-291)

The problem is complicated for me by the fact that no sooner than did he began to use the Platonic language of the *metaxy , Voegelin* apparently ceased to use the term "spiritual realism." I must say, however, if I may put it this way, that I find my own usage of the term "spiritual realism" more "Voegelinian" than Voegelin's own earlier formulation of said concept, because some of the thinkers designated by the "earlier" Voegelin as "spiritual realists" like Dante, Spinoza, Schelling and Nietzsche, may well flunk the test of reality in terms of the *metaxy.*

That the later Voegelin came to see the problem of "demonism" and spiritual realism in a different light from his earlier writings can in my judgment be confirmed by noting his remarks on Machiavelli in *Order and History III*, recently republished by the University of Missouri Press (vol. 16 of Collected Works, 2000) and edited with an Introduction by the present writer. For example, on p. 279 Voegelin compares Machiavelli and Plato and says that Plato, unlike Machiavelli, rejected the "tyrannical alternative" of unification by means of power politics alone, for he knew that said alternative "would have meant, as it did for Machiavelli, the renunciation of the spirit and the fall into demonism." Here "demonism" seems to be used in a condemnatory way unlike its earlier equation, as in Goethe, with "genius." The difference, I would argue, is the result of Voegelin's deepened understanding of reality in the wake of his philosophy of history based on the "leaps in being" and the primacy of theophanic experience.

A second terminological problem which I have confronted concerns the meaning of the adjective "demonic." Once more, I draw on the expertise of Professor Ellis Sandoz to clarify the problem at hand. As he has written to me in the same communication cited above, "The term demonic is ambiguous in Voegelin and does not necessarily or often equal evil or Satanic... {The demonic is} a spiritual force beyond good and evil representations of Being, one that can be either Good or Satanic.... {So, the Demonic }a semi-divine capacity found in exceptional men, the kind of personality Nietzsche admires from antiquity (heroic) but spiritualized; or in Machiavelli the kind that can master Fortuna through virtu`, or in St. Paul, the man who is a 'law unto himself. "'

Now, in what follows I shall use the term demonic to stand for what Machiavelli recognized -- and which I think it is clear from the quotations I give below that Voegelin understood that Machiavelli recognized--to be evil, but nonetheless capable of being harnessed to results held to be good by the many, who, after all, judge by appearances. So for Machiavelli the result or "outcome" *(il fine)* of the demonic personality's actions in the world where the many call the tune, may be called good as indicated in Prince, ch. 18 if indeed he is a Borgia and not an Agathocles, the difference being that Borgia harnessed his demonism to an idea--the new Italy--whereas Agathocles had no objective but self-indulgence. (Please see note 6 below for further remarks on Voegelin's use of "demonic.")

Let me now briefly flesh out a bit the meaning of spiritual realism, as I understand it. The spiritual realist approaches politics as an activity taking place in the *metaxy* or Between of human life: life takes place between the contrasting poles of good and evil, hope and despair, joy and misery, and the everlasting and the ephemeral. Spiritual realism, I contend, is the only realism that is truly realistic--i.e., that confronts reality as it is and not as we would like it to be or fear it on the verge of becoming. THE SPIRITUAL REALIST HAS IDEALS, but tempered

ones. He or she is not a utopian, but a constructor of paradigms-models capable of being diluted by degrees until they may come into contact with and be applicable to the empirical situation in a given society. (Plato and Aristotle showed us the way here.) In today's world, the spiritual realist thinks of democracy neither as paradigm nor as panacea but in Churchill's words as "the worst form of government, except for all the others." The spiritual realist aspires to "improve" things in terms of making social arrangements more just, but has moderate expectations for success. In the words of T.S. Eliot:

There is the only the trying; The rest is not our business.

Finally, the spiritual realist rejects all shortcuts allegedly available for the transformation of the human condition through natural science and technology: technology is a mixed blessing and salvation will not come through the internet or some other technological fix, because salvation is not to be found in the world. And so forth. I am sure that you, gentle reader, can think of many other examples of this kind.

II. Was Machiavelli a Spiritual Realist?

But enough of this terminological digression. Let us turn to our question of the day, viz., "Was Machiavelli a Spiritual Realist? "--using my own understanding of the term as inspired by the later Voegelin. Now Voegelin himself in his masterful interpretation of Machiavelli in volume 22 of the *Collected Works* has disposed of the conventional interpretation, still popular with most political scientists, that Machiavelli was nothing but a crackpot or vulgar realist. Indeed, Voegelin uses some of his most vigorous expressions against those who have portrayed Machiavelli as a Machiavellian--as a "teacher of evil," to be precise. He pronounces the great Florentine a "healthy and honest figure, most certainly preferable as a man to the contractualists who try to cover the reality of power underneath ... the immoral swindle of consent."5 With this verdict I am in entire agreement. Machiavelli called a spade a spade, had no theory of a double morality, one for citizens and the other for rulers, was no mere technician or "expert" adviser on how to achieve power as an end in itself, was not a nihilist, or a cynic or a Callicles-like worshipper of "might is right," and did not like Locke engage in the "swindle of consent." Like a gigantic vacuum cleaner, Voegelin sucks up and destroys all the simple-minded, fallacious, and ignorant interpretations of Machiavelli prominent in much of the scholarly literature by political scientists. (The historians, such as Hans Baron and Felix Gilbert, seem to have acquitted themselves better, recognizing that Machiavelli's thought is a delicate tissue of many layers.) The only prominent conventional misinterpretation Voegelin fails to spot is the one which ignorantly misattributes to Machiavelli the maxim "the end justifies the means," a misattribution due to a faulty translation of a line in Prince, ch. 18, and which I discuss in detail in my article "Second Thoughts on Strauss's Machiavelli," cited below. I might add that Dr. Chaiwat Satha-Anand of Thammasat University in Bangkok has in his highly original doctoral dissertation for the University of Hawaii shown the degree to which Machiavelli thought it unintelligent to "rely on the Lion alone," and how in *Y7ie Prince* the great Florentine laid great emphasis on learning how to "maneuver around men's brains" in politics. Machiavelli's "political realism" was not vulgar but subtle, so much so, argues Dr. Chaiwat, that proponents of non-violence have much that they can learn from him!

What about our second alternative: Machiavelli as an "idealist" in politics? To quote for convenience my own definition: "Political idealists substitute a utopian dream world for the reality of existence in the *metaxy* and magically wish away the antagonistic, destructive, and demonic potentialies of human nature. Idealists imagine all human beings to be (at least potentially) like themselves--or rather like their self-congratulatory fantasies about themselves." (Germino, PP *and the OS, p. 179) Now, I* personally have a suspicion that Machiavelli has more than a touch of idealism in his make-up. It is no accident that almost everyone agrees that Machiavelli was a leading figure in the evocation of sentiments which we now commonly call by the name of "modernity." What is modernity if it be not idealistic?

But before continuing to argue the case for Machiavelli as "idealist," let us dwell for a moment on the problem of what Voegelin calls Machiavelli's "demonism." According to Voegelin, Machiavelli gave his blessing to the demonic streak in his political founding hero. What is Cesare Borgia if he be not demonic, and yet he was apparently Machiavelli's chief model for the "new prince" who would "liberate Italy from this barbarian domination that stinks in our nostrils"? Voegelin himself on several occasions in both volumes 22 and 25 of CW recognizes what he calls the "demonic" element in Machiavelli, and even goes so far as to say that in Machiavelli we encounter "a demonic closure of the soul against transcendent reality." And yet despite this, in vol. 25 Voegelin refers approvingly to "the demonic *realism* of Machiavelli." Well, if Gebhardt is right and the purpose of spiritual realism is to protect the spirit from being mangled by distinctly unspiritual forces, how can a "demonic realism" closed to transcendence do the job? 6 It sounds rather as if the Mafia were called in to "protect" Socrates. It would seem more consistent for Voegelin to have said that out of an idealistic fixation, which he correctly notes was recognized by Guicciardini, Machiavelli was led in this instance to re-define demonism as heroism, perhaps under the conscious or unconscious influence of Timur's meteoric rise to power and conquest which, as Voegelin shows, had mesmerized a generation of historians before Machiavelli.

To illustrate further the idealistic component in Machiavelli, is it not a fact that the final chapter 26 of the Prince is one of the most idealistic pieces of propaganda ever penned? It is indeed entitled an "Exhortation," and we are told that manna would come down from Heaven to feed the hungry and that faction torn Italy would rise up and receive him, *i1principe nuovo,* as one family, united in love and adoration of him. "They make a desert and call it peace," reported Tacitus about the Romans, 7 and similarly to the Romans Machiavelli appears to hail as "heroic" the actions of a political gangster who first has his lieutenants do his dirty work and when they are no longer useful displays them "in two pieces" beside a chopping block in the piazza to appease the masses and who invites all his enemies to dinner and has them strangled! (Yet, see the ensuing quotation from his other "Exhortation"--this one on "Repentance"--- for a declaration by Machiavelli that the penitent man "meditates" on but does not "delight" in the doings of the wicked.)

So we may see as one apparent component in Machiavelli the idealization of demonism. Perhaps the Florentine Secretary was aware of what he was doing when in a letter to Vettori he referred to the work that was posthumously to be published under the title 11 *Principe* as a *ghiribizzo,* a word that may be variously translated as "caprice," "whim," "fantasy" or "joke." If that be true, then the joke is on us--or on those of us who take the *Prince* too literally. It is rather as if

Machiavelli thought to himself, "in my ideal world, or second reality, brutality will turn out to have good results." And therefore, although it can never be *morally justified in* terms of the Table of Virtues in Chapter 15, it will be "excused" by the common people if it advances their Cause.

But there are other more easily recognizable idealistic threads in the Machiavellian tapestry. Was it not Rousseau who observed that *The Prince* "is a book for republicans"? Can anyone contest that Machiavelli was the first writer of stature to praise the common people, as he himself claimed? What is his call for "new modes and orders" but the first blast of the trumpet in the intellectual evocation of the modem democratic idea, viz. the substitution of the tradional order of verticality issuing in a "society of unequals" by the new order of horizontalism, or the "society of equals." 8 It is true that we had to wait until Condorcet and others in the 18th Century to espouse the democratic evocation in its fullness, but Machiavelli is the first writer ever to address the prince with the familiar "tu" instead of the formal "Lei", thereby implying a relationship of equality rather than of superiority-inferiority between himself and his Lord.

Machiavelli's ferocious attack upon denigrators of the people --as in his contempt for the proverb "He who builds on the people builds on mud,"--may in part at least represent an idealization of the people's judgment, as is the case with his simplisitic dichotomy between "the few who desire to oppress" and "the people who desire (only) not to be oppressed." 9

Like all idealists, Machiavelli has stacked up a row of villains who are ruining the progressive course of history, destroying the utopian hope for establishing a"perpetual republic" within time and the world. (One must read the Discourses carefully to see that, while in one place Machiavelli denies there can be a perpetual republic in another he admits it as a possibility-4 refer here to Discorsi III, chapters 17 and 21, respectively.) There is first the Roman Catholic Church, which he caricatures at times in a manner almost worthy of Luther, whom he strangely never mentions but of whose mighty Reformation Machiavelli cannot but have been aware with his diplomatic contacts. (Machiavelli died only in 1527, or ten years after the public beginning of the Lutheran revolt.) After the Church there are the nobles--i *grandi--who sit* in their castles and parasitically live off the sweat and blood of the people. Then, there are the humanist intellectuals who are mere conternplators and who refuse to harness themselves to the Cause of evoking a new order of Horizontalism. Finally, there is Islam or "the Turk, the threat of what is not European, of the hordes threatening Europe from "Asia." In this respect, Machiavelli echoes Luther's "War against the Turk" of 1519.

But is there no case to be made for Machiavelli as a spiritual realist? Yes, I think that there is a basis for such a case, although on other grounds than those cited by Voegelin in his treatment of Machiavelli in his *History of Political Ideas.* If spiritual realism entails the protection of the spirit from its imprisonment in the practical everyday concerns of the political *cosmion , then,* far from offering breathing space for the spirit, Machiavelli instead constructs an alternative intramundane prison for it. For the great Florentine appears to have been busier evoking a new, modem, egalitarian *cosmion* than with exploring all dimensions of reality. He may have sought to replace one "fragment" of reality with another, and it is not always clear that the substitution was an improvement. 10 To quote Voegelin himself, toward the end of his chapter on Machiavelli: "The creed of the *spirito italiano* and the *onore del mondo* ... is a rejection of the transcendental

meaning of history and a reversion to the tribalism of the particular community." 11

However, I do not think that we can leave Machiavelli frozen in this moment of tribalistic closure. Machiavelli the Italian patriot, the first- and, over the centuries until its creation as a nation, the leading- voice for Italian independence, is certainly an important part of his legacy. But I do not think Machiavelli was deaf to the call of the universal open society of all humankind. I do not agree at all with Voegelin that "there is nothing enigmatic" about Machiavelli. Nor do I agree with Voegelin that Machiavelli was definitely "not a Christian" but rather religiously a "pagan." 12 Voegelin seems to have been unfamiliar with the Florentine Secretary's "Exhortation to Repentance," which ends with a quotation from a Sonnet by Petrarch:

And repent and understand clearly That all that pleases the world is but a brief dream. 13

On Machiavelli and Christianity, I would perhaps agree with Bernard Crick's summation of my view when he wrote that "for Professor Germino Machiavelli is a funny kind of Christian." .14 Yet, that he believed himself to be a Christian (I would say an odd rather than a "funny" one) seems to me to be as clear as anything is about Machiavelli. He signs his most intimate letters "Christ be with you," and in the "Exhortation to Repentance," after quoting Corinthians 13 on caritas, he writes:

"On this (Charity) is based the Christian faith. He cannot be full of charity who is not full of religion, because charity is patient, is kindly, is not envious, is not perverse, does not show pride, is not ambitious, does not seek her own profit, does not get angry, *meditates on the wicked man, does not delight in him,* does not take pleasure in vanity, suffers everything, believes everything, hopes everything. Oh divine virtue! Oh, happy are those that possess you! This is the heavenly garment in which we must be clad if we are to be admitted to the celestial marriage feast of our Emperor Jesus Christ in the heavenly kingdom!" 15

In general, we may say that with this second Exhortation, Machiavelli apparently seeks to inject the perspective of spiritual realism to provide overall balance to his cogitations on the human condition, and that indeed the "Exhortation to Repentance" is to be read conjointly with the "Exhortation to Liberate Italy ... etc" if one is to grasp the whole of the Florentine's meditations.

Now, it might be responded, of course, that Machiavelli is being ironic here, that he is making a set speech probably required for admission into a club or confraternity of some sort, that he is cloaking himself in religion to avoid persecution, etc. (This would most certainly have been the reply of Professor Strauss, even if one of his most able followers, Harvey Mansfield, calls Machiavelli "an exceedingly bold writer.") And then one must consider these lines from his May 27, 1521 letter to his great contemporary Guicciardini:

"..(f)or a long time I have not said what I believed, nor do I ever believe what I say, and if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find." 16

Of course the last statement may itself be doubted, since he says he never believes what he says, so we may invoke the Russellian paradox and conclude that he is not believing that he does not believe what he says. In any event, on this point I am much more inclined to agree with

Benedetto Croce, who said that Machiavelli was "an enigma that will never be resolved" than with Eric Voegelin, who claimed that there was nothing enigmatic about his political teaching!

Conclusion

Now to return to the question posed in my title: "Was Machiavelli a Spiritual Realist?" My conclusion--provisional conclusion, because the Florentine Secretary and self-styled "Tragic and Comic Writer" looks slightly different every time one immerses oneself in him--is that it is not possible to give a hard and fast answer, for the very simple reason that Machiavelli was living through the disintegration of Western civilization and was part of what Voegelin calls "The Age of the Great Confusion." 17 1 conclude, therefore, that Machiavelli was (pardonably) confused, that he was enigmatic because he was confused, and that there are elements of all three approaches -- Vulgar Realism, Idealism, and Spiritual Realism --in his work. (However, Vulgar or Unspiritual Realism exists in Machiavelli to the degree that some passages are taken literally and without irony. As Hans Baron has noted, Machiavelli's life "will always have to be presented as a delicate tissue of sometimes conflicting motivations, not simply as a neat succession of distinct phases.") 18

Finally, let me suggest that if we want the clarity of the authentic spiritual realist, we need to go back to Plato and forward to Voegelin. ###

Appendix on Gebhardt on Spiritual Realism

It has belatedly come to my attention that Juergen Gebhardt contributed an article on Spiritual Realism in Voegelin to the Festschrift published in his honor edited by Peter Opitz and Gregor Sebba, entitled *The Philosophy of Order* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1981), 332-344, entitled "Erfahrung und Wirklichkeit: Anmerkungen zur PolitishcenWissenschaft des spirituellen Realismus." In it Gebhardt signals his acceptance of the category "secular spiritual realist," and Voegelin's inclusion of Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Spinoza, Schelling, and Nietzsche. I have already given my critique of this concept in the text. As for the term "Spiritual Realism" itself Gebhardt centers his definition on the comment in the then unpublished History of Pe4itical Ideas (section on "The Middle Ages, The Church, and the Nations") by Voegelin as follows: Spiritual Realism indicates "the attitude of the political thinker ... who has to detach himself intellectually, and sometimes practically, from the surrounding political institutions because he cannot attribute to them representative ftinctions for the life of the spirit which he experiences as real within himself." Once more the vagueness of Voegelin's usage of the term in the History of Politcal Ideas is highlighted when, having first described Spiritual Realism as a "modem" and even a "secular" term, Voegelin includes Plato among these Realists in his article "Nietzsche, the Crisis and the War," VI, Journal of Politics (1 944), 178, ff. There Voegelin remarks that "Platonism in Politics is the attempt, perhaps hopeless and futile, to regenerate a disintegrating society spiritually by creating the model of a true order of values, and by using as the material for for the model realistically the elements which are present in the substance of society." (Quoted, Gebhardt, p.3 3 8) There follows a comment by Voegelin on Nietzsche casting severe doubt on whether the latter was a Spiritual Realist at all. Regrettably, it cannot be said that Gebhardt either indicates the confusions in "early" Voegelin's treatment of the concept--and also note that he is at this point still using the term "values," which he will later discredit--or does

anything to clarify them in his contribution to the Festschrift.

Endnotes

1 In Political *Philosophy and the Open* Society (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982), 1 follow the most able of the "unspiritual realists," Hans Morgenthau, as regards to the definition of "realism": the thinker whom he calls the political realist "maintains the autonomy of the political sphere ... He thinks of interest defined as power." The political realist "subordinates other standards of thought to the political one." Quoted in Ibid., 178-79. 1 then criticise Morgenthau's notion of politics as being too narrow, precisely because it excludes the realm of Geist. I maintain that this political realism of Morgenthau "concentrates too heavily on the negative pole of the metaxial balance." Idealism, on the other hand, veers too close to the positive pole. Only "spiritual realism" is truly balanced in its representation of the metaxial reality. A truly realistic theory of politics, I argue, must include the spiritual dimension, both as regards its potential in humans for good and for evil.

2 See Conclusion to Gebhardt's Introduction to Eric Voegelin, 25 *Collected Works: The New Order and the Last Orientation,* ed. by Juergen Gebhardt and Thomas Hollweck (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999), Introduction by Gebhardt, 33-34. For the long quotation by Voegelin extending spiritual realism back to Dante, and including Bodin, Spinoza and Hobbes, see Eric Voegelin, 19 *Collected Works: Hellenism, Rome, and Early Christianity,* ed. by Athanasios (Columbia and London: U. of Mo. Press, 1997), quoted in the "General Introduction to the Series," by Thomas Hollweck and Ellis Sandoz, 34. Perhaps Voegelin would have cleared up the discrepancies in his use of 11spiritual realism" had he prepared the Ms. for final publication, and hopefully would also have modified the unfortunate adjective "secular" to describe these thinkers, for it is hard to see how any of them was "secular" or indeed how a 11spiritual realist" could possibly be "secular," for secularism presupposes the exclusion of the spirit from politics! Regrettably, Gebhardt does not discuss this problem.

3.CW, vol 25, 34. See also Ibid., 51 for Voegelin's distinction between the "demonic realism" of Machiavelli, the "contemplative realism" of Bodin, and the "psychological realism" of Hobbes. On this same page one finds the following remark by Voegelin on Machiavelli: "Machiavelli's myth of the demonic hero had its function in the hope of the political savior of Italy..." He also writes of "the horror of the Prince" as the "revelation of the demonic Nature of Man as the source of order."

4 See *inter alia* Voegelin's comparison of Schelling and Aquinas, in Ibid., 240. But see also n. 2.

5. Eric Voegelin, 22 *Collected Works: Renaissance and Reformation,* ed. D.L. Morse and Wm. M. Thompson (Columbia and London: U. of Mo. Press, 1998), 55, 64, 82-84.

6. Eric Voegelin, CW, vol. 22, op.cit., 86 and vol. 25, op.cit., 61, emphasis added. Apparently Voegelin used the terni "demonic" for the first time in print in 1933. Klaus Vondung points out in his Introduction to the English translation of Voegelin's book *Die Rassenidee in des Geistgeschichte von Ray bis Carus* that with Schiller's apotheosis of Goethe "the term demonic came to be used as an equivalent for *genius* ... The demonic figure found its most distinct

description, in Voegelin's eyes, as the 'well-born man' in Carus' appreciation of Goethe." Editor's Introduction to Eric Voegelin, 3 *Collected Works: The History of the Race Ideaftom Ray to Carus* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1998), xvi. Voegelin indeed declares in this early work that "the idea of the demonic ... consciously takes up pagan nuances; the sacred and the moral recede and the fertile, generative element ('the productive' in Goethe's terms) comes to the fore." Ibid., 10. 1 am grateftil to Ellis Sandoz for indicating this passage to me. Despite this passage and other similar ones in the book on the *Race Idea, I* do not think that the interpreter of Voegelin can without qualification, transpose Voegelin's 1933 characterization of the term demonic to the *History of Political Ideas,* written some 15 to 20 years later, because in the *History* Voegelin pronounces it to be a form of "closure" of the soul in the Bergsonian sense and so the concept of the demonic takes on for Voegelin a negative hue missing in the earlier characterization. Voegelin in the interim has begun to develop his philosophy of history in terms of which it is not permissible philosophically to regress from a more to a less differentiated symbolic language and the Platonic symbolization, along with Israelite and Christian revelation, has become paradigmatic for Voegelin in history. Finally, it would be a bit of a stretch to equate Cesare Borgia with Goethe, to revert to Schiller's characterization of demonic evoked by Voegelin in 1933. It seems that also that the Socratic *daimonion* may have lingered in Voegelin's mind as the equivalent of "demonic," however inconsistent this would be with his characterization of the demonic in Machiavelli as "closed to transcendence."

7. *"Solitudinem jaciunt pacem appellant. " T*acitus, Agricol , 3 0, from a set speech of the British chieftan Galgacus. I am indebted to Benedetto Fontana for this reference. In his "Tercets on Ambition," Machiavelli expressed a similar pathos over the mindless destruction of war and other forms of human cruelty. See Gilbert, trans., *Machiavelli: The Chief Works,* 3 vols., (Durham,N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965),Il, 735-39 especially at 738.

8 See Dante Germino, "Fennema's Theory of the Intellectual Construction of Modem Democracy," paper written in 1999, for a development of the theme of the evocation of modem democracy as a "society of equals" on the basis of the Dutch political theorist Meindert Fennema's work *De Moderne Democratie: Geschiedenis van een Politieke Theorie* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1995). See the Dutch legal theorist Andreas Kmneging I s important book *Aristocracy, Antiquity and History* (Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1997) for a learned exposition of the "society of unequals" accepted unquestioningly by the predemocratic *cosinion* in Europe generally and France in particular.

9 Machiavelli, II *Principe,* ch. 9. Harvey Mansfield's English translation indicates the many times Machiavelli uses the familiar "tu" in addressing the prince.

10 On the disintegration of Western civilization into fragments in the 16th century, see in particular Voegelin, CW vol.25, 193-198.

11 Voegelin, CW vol.22, 86-7.

12 Ibid., 31-2, 84, 86.

13 Machiavelli, "An Exhortation to Repentance," in Gilbert, op.cit., 1, 171-74. For a more

extended analysis of this neglected document, see Dante Germino "Second Thoughts on Leo Strauss's Machiavelli," 28 *Journal of Politics*, (1966) 794-817.

14 From "Bibliographical Appendix" by Bernard Crick, ed., Machiavelli: *The Discourses* (Penguin Books, 1970 and further editions).

15 Machiavelli, in Gilbert, Chief Works, 1, 173.

16 Machiavelli, in Ibid., 11, 973.

17 Voegelin, CW, vol. 22, 217, ff.

18 Hans Baron, *In Search of florentine Civic Humanism* (2 vols., Princeton University Press, 1989), 11, 147. See also Baron's reference to what he calls "the differences (in Machiavelli) that arise from his varying emotional outlook." Ibid., 118. For a learned and sophisticated exposition of the view that Machiavelli *did* have a consistent teaching about politics and religion, see Benedetto Fontana, "Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli," Journal of the History of Ideas (1999), 639-658.-