Christianity in the Western Tradition

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INTRODUCTION

Any history of Western political and moral thought—or a course on the same subject—tells a story, not just about each text, but also about the relationship of texts to one another. If we wish to understand the distinctive character of each text we study, we cannot help but do what we so often ask our students to do on their examinations: compare and contrast. Courses that teach the texts in chronological order tell the story of Western Civilization with, in these politically correct times, occasional side trips to more distant locales. A staple plot in this story is the tale of the ancients and the moderns, the story of the modern revolt against ancient ways of thought or, with a slightly different bent, the story of the great tradition of political and moral thought that begins in Athens and Jerusalem and is rejected by the founders of modernity.

This plot is not just a product of our contemporary attempts to give a surview of the intellectual trajectory of the west. It is an old plot that comes into existence along with modernity itself. For the founders of modernity were well aware of their status as originators of something new. And, in defending their new way of thought, they themselves drew contrasts to what had come before. That is not to say that Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes and Locke and their followers were entirely explicit about what they were up to. To one degree or another, modern thought breaks with Christian teaching. But when they draw attention to their innovations in thought, the philosophers I named are more likely to attack Greek ideas.[1] This is, in part, because the Christian theology and philosophy they reject is a melding of Greek philosophy and Biblical religion. So, if they are to reject that way of thought it seems eminently sensible for radicals to turn their attention to the roots of that tradition in Greece. This contrast of ancients and moderns also has the distinct advantage of leaving the status of Christianity ambiguous. Greek philosophy—and the synthesis of that philosophy with biblical religion—can be rejected without explicitly rejecting the Bible.

Mid-twentieth century interpreters of early modernity have less reason for reticence. Both defenders and opponents of the modern project come to see it as a rejection of not just Ancient Greek philosophy but, also, of Biblical religion. And thus the story of ancients and moderns is transformed. Now modernity is seen by its critics as a revolt against a Great Tradition that has two roots, in Athens and Jerusalem.[2] And defenders of modernity, who bemoan the failure of our civilization to wholly free itself from the illusion of religion, say that we can be explicit where the founders of modernity had to be circumspect. So we can recognize, for example, that when Locke approves of Christianity because it is "reasonable" he is substituting reason for revelation as the standard by which we should judge any way of thought and thereby rejecting the status Christianity claims for itself. We can also begin to see just how far modern political and moral ideals are from those of Christianity.

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[1] Machiavelli is a partial exception although I would suggest that even he hides the depth of his opposition to Christianity. Indeed, that opposition is so hidden that more than one interpreter of Machiavelli has taken him to be a believer.

[2] See, for example, among other works, Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Similar sentiments can be seen in the work of Erich Vogelin and Leo Strauss. The godfather of this way of thinking is, of course, Nietzsche, who held that Christianity is Platonism for the masses. Of course, one might suspect that some of those who today focus on the contrast between the ancients and the moderns have reasons similar to those of the early moderns for leaving the status of Christianity ambiguous, even if they praise the ancients over the moderns.

The urge to draw a sharp line between ancients and moderns is less strong in post-modern thought, which tends to lump all claims to the truth together as misguided. Thus, for some post-modern thinkers, Bentham's utilitarianism is no less oppressive than—and no less a product of "foundationalist thought" or, in French translation, phallo-logocentrism—than the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. Still, the more moderate post-moderns tend to see modern thought as a precursor of their own. For these thinkers, the trouble is that Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes and Locke did not go far enough in overthrowing what some Enlightenment thinkers called the "Christian superstition."

In this paper I would like to present a different story, one that sees modernity—and especially liberal democratic thought—as decisively influenced by Christianity in particular and Biblical religion in general.[3] That is not to say I shall argue that the founders of modernity were Christian thinkers. Whatever their explicit claims—and whatever the claims of some of their interpreters—I do not think we can read Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke carefully and then conclude that they were in any straightforward sense Christians.[4] Yet, in building modern thought, these philosophers, and their followers, took over certain themes and attitudes that are characteristically Christian and, in particular, that are given their most influential expression by Augustine. Moreover, these themes and attitudes decisively separate Augustinian Christianity from Greek and, in particular, from the Platonic-Aristotelian thought. Thus my claim is not so much that modernity is Christian in nature—I agree with the proponents of the great tradition that it is, at base, fundamentally anti-Christian. Rather, my claim is that the notion of a Great Tradition is itself if not a myth than entirely overstated. There are parallels between Platonic and Aristotelian ideas and Christian notions in large part because the former has influenced the latter. But, by the time of Augustine, the great tradition of Greek philosophy had long come to an end and had been replaced something very different. And, while modernity may reject the theological and philosophical roots of Christianity, it does not reject but draws upon Christian conceptions of human nature and the tasks of politics.

Before I go on, let me make three qualifying remarks. First, as I just suggested, the Christianity I am particularly concerned with here is that influenced by Augustine. There are other Christianities. And, the Christianity one takes to be normative will greatly influence one's view of the relationship between Christianity and that which came before and after it. If, for example, one takes Aquinas to be the supreme interpreter of Christianity, then the notion of a Great Tradition or Perennial Philosophy becomes rather more plausible. For Aquinas's Aristotelianism is a more faithful to the original than is Augustine's Platonism. (That, however, could be one good reason to have doubts about whether Aquinas is our best guide to the deepest insights of Christianity.) If the dispute between the view of Christianity in the Western tradition I take here, and the view I reject, comes down to which version of Christianity we take to be canonical, I would not be concerned. Augustinianism is certainly one of the dominant strands with Christianity. And it stands behind the ideas of the most vigorous Christians, at least in America, today. So it is certainly worthwhile trying to get a better handle on the place of Augustinian Christianity in the Western tradition.

Second, when I talk about the ancients, I follow the defenders of the great tradition thesis in referring primarily to Plato and Aristotle. Neither those who hold the traditional view, nor those who hold the view

[3] There are certainly other kinds of modern thought. In a longer paper I would point to some of the ways in which, for example, communism also is influenced by Christianity. And I certainly would point to the way in which other modern tendencies of thought—most notably, fascism—are radically different from Christianity.

[4] Descartes clearly deserves to be considered one of the founders of modernity. I leave him out of the account I develop here largely because I much less knowledgeable about his political and moral views than I am of the other philosophers I have mentioned.

I defend would say that Christianity is all that similar to, say, Epicureanism which some writers see as having a distinctive influence on Modern thought.

Third, I should say that the story I wish to tell about the ancients and moderns is not original with me. I have been influenced by the work of, among others, Herbert Deane and Leo Strauss, as well as by some interpreters of Strauss, Shadia Drury and Clark Merrill.[5] My sense, however, is that, to the extent that anyone thinks about these issues, this story I will quickly retell here is less well known than the one that focuses on the Great Tradition. For, as I have suggested, both those who bemoan the passing of that tradition, and those who bemoan its survival, agree in seeing modernity as a radical break with a long, continuous tradition. And, at least in my limited reading of the literature, I have not seen any one point to all of the parallels between Augustine and modern liberalism—and the differences between Augustine and the Greeks—that I shall mention here.

Fourth, in a paper of this size, I cannot do more than offer some pointers to a different way of thinking about the ancients and the moderns. Since it is impossible to fully defend my views in this small space, I will make little or no attempt to do so. I will throw scholarly caution—and the scholarly apparatus—to the wind and, instead, be as provocative as I can be. Someday, perhaps, I will write a nuanced, heavily qualified, and long book that makes a plausible case for the arguments I put forward here.[6] Now, however, all I mean to do with these Cliff Notes for a book to be written is to encourage some new thought about where we are and how we go there.

THE GREAT TRADITION

Before turning to my own views, let me briefly rehearse the idea of the great tradition of Western Civilization with roots in Athens and Jerusalem. Defenders of this thesis claim that two roots can feed the same tree because both Greek philosophy and Biblical religion share the aim of ennobling human beings. Modernity, on this telling of the tale, rejects the pursuit of nobility and builds on lower, if more solid, foundations.

Human Nature and the Pursuit of the Good

On the traditional view, Greek and Christian perspectives on human beings and politics are united, first, in their picture of human nature. On both views, we human beings have the capacity to choose between one kind of life and another. While we all have our own particular desires, these desires are particular exemplifications of the more general desires common to all human beings. And human happiness consists in finding the best way to articulate this common human nature. The desires we have at any one time may not be the best way to satisfy the more general and deeper desires found in all human beings. Our desires might have become distorted or warped because we have been raised badly or because of some peculiarity in our nature. So we can criticize our particular desires. We do so, however, not by looking inside ourselves but, rather, by looking beyond ourselves to human nature in general and to our place in the world as a whole. If we are educated properly, we will rise above the appetites we share with the animals and devote ourselves to virtues, both moral and intellectual. We will devote ourselves to the good of our community or to the pursuit of knowledge or God. And, in doing so, we will find the happiness for which we are fitted either here in this world for the Greeks or in the next one for Christians

[5] And, as Richard Fairbanks has pointed out to me, Charles Taylor has noted some parallels between Augustine and modernity in *Sources of the Self*.

[6] Of course, the likely result of such an effort would be to generate publicity for the less nuanced and qualified views that I put forth here.

For modern thinkers, on the other hand, our fundamental aims and purposes beings are discovered not by looking outwards but, rather by looking inwards at our own wants. Diversity and individuality are the hallmark of human wants. And happiness consists in satisfying our wants, whatever they happen to be.

Of course, ancient Greeks and Christians are well aware of the diversity of human ends. But they claim that reason can discover, and God's word can confirm, the truth of what we are. And, in recognizing this truth—or in being raised properly—we come to see that certain desires are more central to what we are. Other desires are more peripheral and still others are the product of a disordered soul. The pre-modern writers differ on the source of this disorder. For Plato and Aristotle, it seems that the political and family circumstances in which we are raised, not to mention a certain amount of sheer luck, is responsible for the character of our soul. For Augustinian Christians, it is ultimately the sin of Adam and Eve that creates disorder in our souls and the grace of God that restores it. But, regardless of this important difference, the fundamental notion that there is a way of life that is proper and fitting to human beings is central to the teaching of the texts that come down to us from Athens and Jerusalem.

Modern thinkers dispute all this. The diversity of human wants points to a profound truth about what we are: Because of differences in our nature and nurture, human beings seek different ends and goals, and will only be satisfied if they can live in a way that attains those goals. Early modern thinkers like Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke, and their later followers among Kantians and utilitarians, insisted that it was impossible for human beings to be mistaken about the goods we want or what would bring us satisfaction.[7] To have a want is to be in a state of uneasiness or pain. Introspection reveals exactly what we need to relieve those states. Later modern thinkers, such as the romantics, took a slightly different view. They held that the desires that should be most important to us could be hard to discern. For conventional moral and religious ideas could create "mind forg'd manacles" that keep us from knowing ourselves. But, while romantic writers allow for the possibility of our being uncertain about or even making mistakes about what might make us happy, they still insist that individuality and diversity are central to human life. When we look inside ourselves, our task is to find that which most distinguishes ourselves from others. Happiness, for romantics, consists in self-realization and individuality rather than the proper articulation of what is common to all human beings.

Reason

Ancients and moderns differ on a second, related issue: the status of reason. Plato and Aristotle, as well as Christian philosophers present what I will call a substantive account of human reason. For the Ancients, reason tells us what human nature is; what common ends we share with other human beings; and the extent to which one kind of life or another will enable us to be fulfilled or satisfied. Moreover, reason is, for Plato and Aristotle, central to the good of the highest way of life human beings, philosophy. Biblical religion supplements reason with revelation. But while that revelation tells us certain things that reason cannot clearly establish on its own, revelation is held to be consonant with, or even better, a fulfillment of the discoveries of reason.

For moderns, reason is instrumental and possibly moral, but not substantive, in nature. Reason does not tell us what a good life is. Ancient writers, like modern ones, recognize that human beings are incredibly diverse in the wants they have. But, for modern writers, there is no basis by which to criticize

[7] We each know best not what makes us happy but, in Locke's terms, the most pressing uneasiness that afflicts us. And happiness, to the extent we can attain it, is the relief from the pain or uneasiness of unsatisfied wants. Indeed, it is doubtful that the modern view allows for the possibility of the kind of happiness promised by ancient thought. After one want is satisfied another one will always raise its head.

the wants we already have. So reason, on the modern view, is primarily instrumental in nature. This is not its whole purpose, of course. There is also what I call a deliberative use of reason. Reason tells us how to organize our lives to satisfy as many of our wants as possible. And, finally, for some modern thinkers who follow Kant (and, I would argue, Locke) reason also can tell us what moral constraints we must following in our pursuit of happiness. These moral constraints, however, derive from our obligation to respect the rights of others, not from some substantive account of our own well-being.

While reason cannot tell us what wants to satisfy, it can tell us how to satisfy each of our wants. And this is the ultimate test of modern scientific knowledge. Such knowledge gives us, in principal, the capacity to transform the material world so as to satisfy our wants.

Morality

Third, ancients and moderns differ about the nature of morality. For the ancients, and especially for those in the Aristotelian tradition, a moral life is a good life, one that realizes human potentialities and serves human happiness. Virtue on the view of Aristotle is the core of human happiness. It is good not as a means, but for its own sake. Similarly, for Christians, the good life is fundamentally one devoted to God, motivated by faith in him, and scrupulous in following his commandments. The fulfillment of our life may not be found in this world. But one's odds of finding happiness in this world, and certainly the next one, are better if one pursues morality and religion for its own sake.

For the moderns, on the other hand, morality constrains our happiness. Morality is necessary for the political community, because widespread immorality will lead to disorder and chaos. It is in our own interest because our immoral actions will be punished by others and, in a good polity, by the government. And, on some modern views, moral action is certainly required by the moral law. But, even where morality serves our interest it is, for the moderns, a means to our ends not something that is good for its own sake. We live up to the demands of morality because we fear the condemnation of others, the power of government, the displeasure of God, or perhaps the voice of reason inside us. Yet, modern views leave out the central reason for being moral according to Greek and Biblical traditions, because our own wellbeing here, and in the future, requires it.

Freedom

Fourth, the great ancient Greek thought and Christianity are distinguished from modern liberalism by their view of freedom. For the ancients freedom is the truth that sets us free, the truth that reveals our true nature to us. While the ancients valued other freedoms—especially for philosophers, the freedom to pursue knowledge—the removal of external constraints on our action is valuable only in so far as it allows us to pursue the right path in life.

However, for moderns, freedom is primarily the removal of restraints on both our actions and our capacity to choose to act in one way rather than another. Given our inability to reason about the content of a good life, the diversity of human endeavors and actions shows us that human beings may have very different wants from one another. Thus a good polity and society must offer its citizens the liberty to purse the good in diverse ways. Freedom, then, consists in removing constraints on the satisfaction of our wants, rather than in discovering our true nature or place in the cosmos. These constraints may include: government restrictions; social mores and expectations; limited resources; and even, in Marxism, natural necessity itself.

Individual and Community

Fifth, the ancients and moderns differ about the relationship between individual and community. For the ancients a good life is a life in which we take part in a strong and vibrant communal life. That kind of life can be found in a variety of forms: in the political life of the polis or in the friendship of the Academy and Lyceum; in the Israelite polity under the laws of God or in the community of followers of Jesus. In each case, community is needed not just for security and safety but because it is the only form of life in which we can fulfill our nature. For, as we have seen human happiness is found, for the Greek and Biblical texts, in a life devoted to the polis, philosophy, or the path of God. The self-government of a democratic polis, the pursuit of knowledge, the effort to become a holy people and nation of priests, or the creation of a Christian fellowship are ways of life that depend upon the creation of a certain kind of community. These different ways of life demand much from the individual, who is expected to put common goals above his or her own. Yet, by the same token, in the ancient world individuals receive common goods, goods that can only be achieved in consort with others.

Modern philosophers divide human aims or actions into those that are egoistic and altruistic and most moderns build their ideal political communities on giving individuals self-interested reasons to engage in actions that benefit others. The ancients, on the other hand, hold that the most central human goods transcend the distinction between egoism and altruism. They encourage people to pursue goods—like pride one one's community, or participation in political affairs, or attendance at the dramatic and athletic contests of Athens or the pursuit of knowledge—that can be received only by those who take part in communal activities.

There is no assumption in these tendencies of thought that then tensions between individual and community can be entirely overcome. And, in Platonic thought in particular, the tensions in political life are evident. Indeed the ancients held that the central virtue is justice precisely because we must distribute goods to individuals in a way that encourages them to be committed to communal goods. Justice, then, is the virtue needed to regulate the tensions between individuals so that they can, together, receive the benefits of communal life.

For moderns, the good life may, but need not, be found in a common life shared with other human beings. In any case, modern political communities demand that individuals be self-directing and self-responsible. Modernity place fewer restrictions on our lives, but also offers us less help in attaining our goals. By the same token, a modern regime does not require us to devote our lives or time or property to the goals of the political community as a whole or some intellectual or religious community within it.

The Task of Politics

Sixth, and as a consequence of the other five claims, the ancients and moderns differ about the primary task of politics. For the ancients, statecraft is primarily soulcraft. If individuals are to purse a good life, be virtuous, be free, and take part in a true community, they must be habituated or socialized to hold certain ideals in common. This habituation is the central aim of political life and is accomplished, in part, by encouraging young people to take part in that political life.

The most important aims of political and social life for modern thought is (1) safety or the protection our life and property and (2) freedom, or the creation of a space in which we can pursue our own aims, whatever they happen to be. On the modern view, it is important that children be taught to respect the rights of others. But this education need not be directly supervised by government. Indeed, it is perhaps better if religious and educational institutions, which are part of the world of society not politics, be

independent of government authority. Moreover, participation in political is entirely optional. It may be a good for some people, but certainly not for many. And it certainly is not a pre-requisite of a virtuous life.

These six differences between ancients and moderns are certainly impressive. I do not deny that they are, for the most part, constitute a plausible and accurate picture of the difference between the thought of the Jerusalem and Athens on the one hand and London, Paris, and New York on the other. And the central ideas of Christianity—or, at least the Christianity that is found in the pre-modern world—can in the ways I have just described be seen to be part of a great tradition of political and moral thought.

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON MODERNITY

The central claim of my paper, however, is that in other respects, Christianity, or at least Augustinian Christianity, breaks with fundamental tenets of Plato and Aristotle. Though modernity does reject many of the tenets of Christianity, it borrows much from Christian thought.[8] I suggest in particular that the modern rejection of Plato and Aristotle is, in some important respects, derived from Christianity.

Human Nature

Having seen some of the distinctive themes of the view I intend to dispute, let me begin an examination of the parallels between Augustinian Christianity and modernity with a discussion of what is at the center of any political and moral theory, its conception of human nature. This is an especially good place to start because the parallels between modernity and Augustinian Christianity are too striking to miss.

Not that they are the same. Augustine teaches that human beings have, or, at the least, once had a choice, to love the earth or God, this world or the next. But because Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, we cannot help but choose the temporal goods of this world. Unless we receive God's grace, we are bound to sin. Thus, for most of us life is spent in pursuit of the goods that satisfy our bodily desires, in pursuit of money, in pursuit of honor and recognition and in pursuit of power and domination. Augustine does not say that, if we seek this worldly happiness, we should turn away from these goods. That is, he does not agree with Plato, who has Socrates teach us that happiness is to be found in the life of philosophy rather than tyranny. Nor does he agree with Aristotle who says that the life of moral or intellectual virtue is that which best realizes our nature. Rather, he says that sex, money, glory and power are precisely the goods we should seek if this world is the only world and if our aim is to have the means to satisfy this-worldly goods. Tyranny is, in that case, preferable to philosophy. But, for Augustine, this world is but an antechamber to the next. And so we should, if only we could, give up the pleasures of temporal goods and choose God and heaven.

If you want to know what the founders of modernity took human nature to be, all you have to do is take Augustine's view of the aims of fallen human beings and stop there. From Augustine's standpoint, the founders of modernity—and especially Machiavelli—are teachers of evil. They teach that the pursuit

[8] In a longer paper, I would more carefully distinguish those features of Christianity that are, in turn, originally found in the Hebrew Bible from those that develop in the first centuries of the Christian era and that are given canonical form by Augustine. And I would also say more about the extent to which the modern appropriation of Christian notions is and is not a return to the teaching of the Hebrew Bible or the interpretation of it found in the Jewish tradition. I just note here that certain features of modern liberalism, especially as found in the United States, are heavily reminiscent of the Jewish tradition: its emphasis on law rather than theory and philosophy; the extent to which the politics of the US is centered on competing interpretations of sacred scripture, that is, the Constitution; our certainly focus on this world rather than the next; and our emphasis on moral action and civic ritual as opposed to speculative belief.

of happiness in this world is to be found in the satisfaction of our desires, whatever they happen to be. But they hold that we may only pursue happiness, not actually attain it. For, when we satisfy one desire, another one immediately pops up. This modern picture of human nature as motivated by unending desire is derived from the Christian notion of fallen man. The moderns also tell us that, whether because they are intrinsically satisfying to human beings, or because they are the means to whatever other ends we have, most human beings will seek money, glory, and power. (No one has any doubt that sex is intrinsically satisfying.) So far, they are not different than Augustine. Where they are different, of course, is that they go no farther. They do not condemn the pursuit of this worldly happiness. Even if they claim to Christians, and even if they call on us to restrain some of our passions for the sake of satisfying others, they rarely step outside this world. They do not claim that God demands that we turn from the goods of this world to those of the next world.[9] At most they demand that we pursue this worldly goods in a way that respects the rights of other.

One might argue that, precisely because he says that we should detach ourselves from the goods of this world and attach ourselves to God, Augustine is closer to the ancients than the moderns. And, indeed, Augustine's virtues are not *all* that different from those found in the Greek philosophers—though one could waste a great deal of time looking for faith, hope, and charity in the collected works of Plato and Aristotle. But the rational status of the virtues—that which makes them choiceworthy—is radically different in Augustine's view. Augustine presupposes that our aim is happiness in the next world, when we will stand close to God. But, for Plato and Aristotle, the rewards of virtue are in this world. Even where Plato tell stories of a next world—and, I would point out, he has Socrates calls these stories myths—he insists that virtue is central to a good life here and now. So, at base, the conception of human nature presupposed by the ancients is much farther from Augustine than is realized in the story of the great tradition. And Augustine's view of fallen mankind is quite close to the picture of human beings found in Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke. As a fine interpreter of Augustine, Herbert Deane, has written

> Augustine's picture of the characteristics of most men, who are sinful and proud, is accepted by Hobbes as a description of the basic drives of all men, and Augustine's condemnation of this sinful nature is rejected.

I shall qualify the last part of Deane's claim in just a moment, when I talk of the constraint of spirit. But, by and large, it seems to me that he is absolutely correct.

Fear

A second theme common to Christianity and modernity is the centrality of fear in political life. The modern reliance on fear as the primary source of political unity has origins in the centrality of the fear of God in Biblical thought. Now this claim is likely to be disputed on two grounds, that fear is especially important in Biblical religion and that it is central to modern politics. Let me address each point in turn.

One feature of ancient political thought that struck their modern critics, and especially Machiavelli, as problematic was the limited attention given Plato and Aristotle give to foreign affairs and military relations between one polis and another. This point can be overstated. Plato's fanciful and, to my mind, humorous, account in the *Republic* of how the kallipolis will respond to external threats does not seem to be the most realistic piece of advice. (Recall that the kallipolis is supposed to invite a threatening polis to

[9] Note, for example, that Locke praises God for implanting in us the bodily desires for without, them, we would die of starvation and fail to procreate. See his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, chapter 21, section 31.

take all the spoils while joining it in taking over a third polis.) But this fantasy certainly teaches us something about the limits of justice in external relations. Still, Plato and Aristotle say relatively little about the use of force in both the external and internal relations of the polis.

The special nature of the polis is the reason that force and violence are not central themes for Plato and Aristotle. The success of the polis depended, more than anything, on unity within it. The polis was faced with almost constant warfare as well as with the possibility of a slave revolt. Arms and money were important, of course. But the polis relied for its defense on an entirely citizen army. Sparta aside, the polis generally did not have a standing army to fight wars and no independent state to direct that army. (And, of course, Sparta's standing army was a citizen army.) That means, of course, that there was no force that could compel citizens to fight. Only deeply devoted citizens willing to sacrifice for their regime could defend the political independence of the polis. Even the polises governed by monarchs, or even tyrants, had to rely on a loyal and devoted citizens. (Recall that, for Plato and Aristotle, tyrants rise with the support of the people, not against them.) So, while arms and money were important, they meant nothing to a polis divided by factional strife. Thus unity and agreement in the polis are necessarily the first concerns of Plato and Aristotle.

Things are very different when one looks at the modern world. As usual, the difference between the ancients and moderns is most clearly brought to a head by Machiavelli. One feature of Machiavelli's thought that clearly distinguishes it from Plato and Aristotle is his reevaluation of tyranny. Plato and Aristotle carefully distinguish between the tyrant and the monarch. The former rules in his own good or the good of one faction of the polis, while the latter rules for the good of all. Machiavelli, on the other hand, collapses this distinction. A prince rules in the good of the people precisely by ruling in his own good. The prince's success in pacifying his country or in expanding its borders secures his position at the same time that it gives his people security and a share in riches. Plato and Aristotle condemn the life of the tyrant. For Plato in the *Republic*, the tyrant is always on the run. He is torn by the excessive desires that plague and, even more, by the constant threat to his position. The just man, that is the philosopher, can, on the other hand, distance himself from the tides of fortune. Machiavelli gives an altogether more attractive picture of the prince who, by ancient standards is a tyrant and yet who, if virtuous enough, can secure his position. There is more than one reason that Machiavelli paints a so much more attractive picture of the life of the tyrant than that found in Plato and Aristotle. For one thing, Machiavelli doubts that we can escape the necessity of acquiring more and more—if only because we have to prevent others from taking what we have. Then, too, Machiavelli's effort to show how virtuous princes can overcome seemingly intractable obstacles is, in part, meant to encourage the actions that can benefit a prince and his people. The motor of Machiavellian politics, after all, is the ambitions of princes or potential princes.

A fascinating character of Machiavelli's text encourages that ambition. Machiavelli often points to a problem encountered by a prince or a potential prince. Initially it seems that there is no solution. Only later do we see that there is a solution, although not one that is easy to reach. Thus, Cesare Borgia's downfall is initially blamed on his illness and the death of his father. Only later do we discover that, by allowing Pope Julius II to come to power, Borgia was responsible for his own failure. Why this odd sequencing? One reason is that Machiavelli is encouraging potential princes to search out solutions to seemingly intractable problems, first in his text and then in real life. Another reason, however, is that Machiavelli is encouraging an incredible optimism in the potential princes who catch on to his little device. They are lead to think that there is always a solution to their difficulties. This attitude surely makes for aggressive (and thus good) princes. But it is hardly realistic. Machiavelli encourages his readers to overlook an important fact of life: for every conquering prince there are many conquered ones. Men who are stimulated into action by Machiavelli seek to conquer Lady Fortuna. But it is the lady herself who is ultimately in control. And it is all of us who benefit from intrepid princes. For effective princes ultimately serve the interest of the people. And the lesson goes for republics as well.

Machiavellian republics are not governed by the people but by one or another potential prince who speaks for the people.

Machiavelli's optimism, then, encourages princes and potential princes to take their chances as they seek power. But there is more to Machiavelli's optimism than his effort to stoke the fire in the belly of princes. Machiavelli does believe that methods exist by which to go far in conquering fortune. Those methods are force and fraud. Central to both of them is the fear of punishment. Force threatens us with punishment in this world. And the greatest fraud is that which engenders the fear of punishment in the next world by what Machiavelli called invisible or imaginary princes.

My suggestion, then, is that Machiavelli learns the power of fear in politics by studying not just Rome but Biblical religion. He points us to the role of force in the Hebrew Bible, when he reminds us that Moses was by no means an entirely unarmed prophet—as shown by his reliance on force in response to the episode of the golden calf—or when he re-tells (and modifies) the story of David and Goliath. And he also leads us to recognize just how much more terrible an all-powerful God can be than the Greek deities. While he criticizes Christianity because it is independent of the political authorities and because it makes men weak, he marvels at the capacity of Christianity to do this. Christianity is more powerful than the Greek and Roman religions because it both quiets the terror of a death that is the end of our being and replaces it with the hope for rewards and, even more so, the fear of punishment, or an extinction that is not necessary—after death. Christianity thus has an enormous capacity to discipline human beings. This, for Machiavelli, is central to its usefulness in the search for political power. Machiavelli gives us examples, small and large, of the force of Christianity. He tells us, for example, of the most awful tyrant who, after killing most of the Cardinals, can not bring himself to kill the Pope because fear of God creates "confusion in the brain." He points to the power of a religion that enables unarmed prophets to conquer Rome. And he shows us how the Church remains independent of civil authorities in Italy all the while acting almost exactly like any other power. The fear of God and the Christian doctrine of humility does, it seems at first, make Christianity a problematic doctrine for Machiavelli precisely because it keeps men from doing what necessity demands. Machiavelli's solution to that difficulty is to teach men how to "know how to be both good and bad." And he does this by showing them that they can adjust to the times without giving up the pretense of Christian religiosity. Just as Christians, being unarmed prophets, must keep the language of Rome while conquering it, Machiavelli, another unarmed prophet who teaches us how to fight with force and fraud, must keep the language of Christianity while utterly rejecting its teachings in practice.[10]

Force and fraud, then, are central to Machiavelli's political teaching. But can we adequately characterize liberal democracy by pointing to his diabolical recommendations? What about the importance of consent in the political philosophy of Hobbes or Locke? The paradox of consent theory in their hands is that the theoretical purpose of consent is rather distant from the actual practice of consent. The ancient polis could only be sustained if it gathered the consent of both rich and poor to the regime under which they lived. Hobbes and Locke, however, use consent theory primarily for the purpose of legitimating the form of government they prefer. Hobbes uses consent theory to explain why everyone should always obey the sovereign. And Locke uses it to explain why the task of government is to protect our rights and little more. Only at the institution of political power in the state of nature is the consent of real, living, breathing human beings required. And even Hobbes is willing to waive the formalities if peace and security demand it.

[10] I learned this way of reading Machiavelli from Harvey Mansfield. See his Machiavelli's *New Modes and Orders* (Cornell University Press, 1971).

If not consent, then what is the source of the legitimacy of modern, liberal democratic government? It is largely that government is a means of avoiding the troubles of the state of nature. The whole point of the state of nature for both Hobbes and Locke is to scare human beings into accepting the constraint of government. Like Machiavelli, and like Augustine, they take it for granted that government is an imposition on us, something we accept only with reluctance. That is not the view of Aristotle. For Aristotle, it is only in political life that most men can realize their true nature. Though politics is a human creation, it is a creation that is both based upon our nature and brings that nature to fruition.[11] It is a good in itself. This claim is decisively rejected by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke for whom politics is a means to an end, the escape from fear. Hobbes and Locke use the state of nature to heighten that fear and, in so doing, to demonstrate the proper ends of government. Of course, Locke's more balanced view recognizes, contra Hobbes, that tyrannical government can be as bad as the state of nature. In each case, however, it is fear that is the prime source of our acceptance (and, for Locke, rejection) of government. And that, of course, is why later theorists, like Hume and Bentham, could reject the fanciful contracts of Hobbes and Locke while accepting most of the latter's political recommendations.[12]

Fear not only justifies the formation of liberal democratic government but plays a large part in sustaining obedience to it. For the liberal state is perhaps the most powerful government in human history. By limiting its authority—and thereby making government less fearful than life without government—the liberal state has gained unchallenged control over the means of violence while, at the same time, developing an extraordinary institutional and technological capacity not only to wage war but to police its citizens. And, if the fear of government is not enough, liberal regimes are quite happy to rely on auxiliary precautions, such as the fear of God, who, at least in the United States, is regularly invoked in support of our political institutions both in large public ceremonies and in each oath before a court of law.

To be fair, I should add that there is more than fear that accounts for the strength of liberal democratic government. The legitimacy of the liberal state is certainly enhanced by the elections we use to choose our political officials. Yet here we find more than a little of the kind of fraud that Machiavelli might admire (and might even have recommended.) For our so-called democratic institutions allow the people a rather limited influence on the direction of public policy. Political elites—Machiavelli called them princes—compete for the approval of the voters—Machiavelli would have said, to escape their censure. But no matter who wins, not all that much is directly changed by the voters and almost nothing that is contrary to the wishes of the united political elite ever happens. We often complain about the undemocratic character of our government when we talk about the influence of money on liberal

[11] Plato accepts this claim as well, although with the delicacy and ambivalence that so characterizes him. For Plato, politics does demand sacrifices that we would prefer not make. Even in the kallipolis, the members of each class must sacrifice their own good for that of the polis. And that is why the polis cannot be based wholly on reason. Each polis is a cave in which certain ideals and ends are, of necessity, taken for granted by most people. Yet, for all that, Plato along with Aristotle recognizes that politics is not only necessary to the creation of a truly human being, but also offers most of us a higher and more fulfilling life than that which we could conceivably attain outside of politics.

[12] It is also why John Rawls's even more fanciful contract is not all that far from the uses made of the social contract formulations of Hobbes and Locke. Rawls's Kantian aspirations, though, leads him to reject the notion that fear provides the main basis of support for liberal democratic regimes. Rawls rejects political stability based upon what he calls a "modus vivendi." Instead, he insists that political stability be based upon agreement to certain principles of justice. Yet, curiously enough, this agreement on political principles must be founded upon the all the disagreements that characterize the "reasonable pluralism" of contemporary life. For reasons I have discussed elsewhere, in a paper entitled "Three Ends and a Beginning" Rawls's attempt to find a moral basis for liberal democracy is bound to fail.

democratic politics—a major influence, to be sure. But that complaint helps hide the deeper point that by the standards of the polis our government is very far from democratic in nature to begin with.

The liberal state also wins the support of the people because it delivers the goods. We shall see in a moment that this accomplishment can become an important basis for political legitimacy only when the liberal restraint on the ends of government is already widely accepted. Moreover, it is not clear just how central economic prosperity is to the persistence of liberal democratic regimes. The established liberal democracies remained astonishingly stable in the depths of the great depression. And there was no peep of opposition to liberal democracy itself during the twenty five years of very slow growth (and declining real wages for about forty percent of workers) from 1973 until 1998. The power of the liberal democratic state, taken together with the difficulty of collective action in a liberal democratic regime—about which I also say more later—makes our regime more stable than any alternative we can imagine.[13]

The Constraint of Spirit

A few pages back I quoted Herbert Deane's remark that unlike Augustine, Hobbes did not condemn man's sinful nature. Deane is right to see a parallel between Augustine and Hobbes. But he does not see quite how far this parallel goes. For the last part of this remark is mistaken. Hobbes, no less than Augustine, does condemn some of our this-worldly desires. For Hobbes, the desires for glory, honor, and recognition are dangerous. For they, along with the desire for power, lead human beings to great undertakings among which is the project to gain political power and, in the extreme case, absolute political authority.

The complex of desires that lead human beings to seek to live up to ideals that distinguish themselves from others and that, therefore, leads them to seek recognition, honor, and glory as testimony to their accomplishments, we can best name by following Plato who called it thumos or, in the most common English translation, spiritedness. The Christian animus against spiritedness is long standing, going back to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus blesses those who are lacking in spirit. And the ideal embodied by this blessing on those who lack spirit is radically different from that found in Greek or Israelite thought. The Athenians thought that political independence was impossible without thumos. The Hebrew Bible holds that slavery was responsible for the broken spirit that afflicted the Israelites newly freed from slavery. Aristotle differs from the Athenians, and, to a lesser extent, the Hebrew Bible, because he holds that, rather than assuring us good fortune or God's providence, moral virtue makes us independent of chance. But, he also held that magnanimity, the virtue of a person who recognizes his own great worth, was central to virtue. For Jesus, however, complete and utter dependence upon God is the hallmark of his true followers. A true Christian has no expectations for this life and is so dependent on God that he hungers and thirsts not just for salvation but for the God granted righteousness that justifies salvation. Augustine closely follows Jesus in making humility the core of virtue. He deepens the account of the gospels by holding that it is only God's grace that can overcome the effects of the fall, and help us turn from this to the next world. And he insists, against the Greek and Roman moralists, that true virtue is never a product of pride and magnanimity. The virtue of the Greeks and Romans is, for Augustine, only a simulacrum of the real thing, one that serves the political community by seeking immortal glory rather serving God in the hope of saving one's immortal soul.

On first look, modernity rejects the Christian praise of humility. After all, doesn't liberal individualism liberate people from the religious and moral restraints on their satisfaction of this-worldly

[13] I have presented some empirical evidence about the comparative stability of liberal democracy in a paper I wrote with Robert Mundt entitled, "Are Democracies Stable? Compared to What?" A draft of this paper can be found at *www.stier.net/writing/stable/stable_frame.htm*.

desires? Isn't rabid competition the hallmark of liberal market economies? There is something right in this perspective. Modern liberal regimes do free a variety of human ambitions from religious and moral restrain. We can devote ourselves to our own happiness without shame. And we can indulge our more unusual tastes with little fear of condemnation. As Michael Walzer once put it, we can celebrate a black mass in our living room without fear of the police and little fear of public censure. Liberalism also encourages us to depend on ourselves for our well being instead of turning to our family, tribe, patron, or God for help. Moreover, liberalism opens up tremendous opportunities for the lower classes. For the first time in history, practically everyone from the top to the bottom can hope to improve their status and income through hard and inventive work, not to mention an opportune marriage. Humility has taken back seat to the power of positive thinking.

All this is true. But it is by no means the whole story. There are ambitions and there are ambitions. At the same time that liberalism liberates our aims, it leads us to lower our sights. Contemporary businessmen are certainly ambitious for position, status, and money. But the contemporary businessman's desire to get rich is a pale copy of the ambitions of an Athenian gentleman for immortal glory in the service of his polis. Contemporary politicians can be called courageous for taking an unpopular stand. But the contemporary politician with a courageous profile is a distant cousin of the Athenian gentleman whose courage leads him to stand fast in wartime. Contemporary philosophers may try to make a contribution to knowledge. But the contemporary theorist's desire to write the definitive treatment of the morality of abortion is hardly in the same ball park as Socrates's invention of political philosophy or Hegel's surview of the entire tradition of Western thought and sensibility. Now and again, people of spirit make their mark in our times. But, as Hobbes taught us, most of us seek merely to do a little bit better than our fellows in the narrow sphere in which they operate.

What constrains spiritedness in the liberal democracies? In large part, it is fear. To paraphrase something Judith Shklar once said, the ambitions of those who seek glory and power is doused with buckets and buckets of fear. It is no accident that she identified fear as central to liberalism. For, while dissenting from the abstract liberalism contemporary moral philosophers think they have learned from Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, Shklar was true to the human inspiration of liberalism.[14] As she pointed out, the fundamental goal of liberal democracy is to reduce our fear of suffering the worst human evils and, especially, of suffering from cruelty. Liberalism attains its goal in no small part by constantly reminding us of the worst that can happen. For, if we keep the fear of cruelty uppermost in our minds, we will devise political and social institutions to protect us from the greatest evils. We will have checks and balances that make it difficult for tyranny—or great leadership—to arise. We will limit the role of politics—in large part by pretending that there is no politics outside the state—and replace political relationships with markets and / or bureaucracies that justify the rule of businessmen and bureaucrats by their presumed mastery of technical knowledge. We will open the possibility for individuals to get rich and thereby divert people with a modicum of spirit from politics to economics.

The very same fear of cruelty leads us as individuals to avoid the risks that always come with great and ambitious enterprises. And why should we take on such risks? The breakdown of hierarchies of thought under liberalism, and the development of the idea that happiness consists in the satisfaction of whatever we happen to want, makes the acceptance of large risks seem utterly foolish. Bentham said that pushpin is as good as poetry. He might have added that the maker of children's games is more likely to live well than the maker of great poetry. Why, when human technology has finally given us the promise of control over some of the most terrifying natural events, should we throw away our advantage with needless risks? The capacity, indeed willingness, to live with risk and uncertainty is, however, the hallmark of people suffused with thumos.

[14] Judith Shklar, *The Liberalism of Fear*, (Cambridge, 1979).

Of course, modern life does not revoke the human situation. It is full of risks and uncertainties. But the risks we focus on—of losing a bundle in the stock market; of getting lung cancer from second hand smoke or toxic wastes; of getting killed in an automobile crash; and even of losing our job—are hardly comparable to the risks of life in an earlier age. And we have much better odds of avoiding those ills than ambitious politicians and warriors—and common citizens, too—had of avoiding much worse. Perhaps, in some ways, we suffer more with less risk than under the old regime. For, as Toqueville pointed out, the confidence that hierarchy breeds in the upper classes of an inegalitarian political community gives gentlemen the wherewithal to live with much greater uncertainty that we do. But whether we suffer from cruelties of everyday life that aristocrats could just laugh off, the point remains that we are unwilling to take the kinds of risks that might lead to the cruelty we so fear.

Even if one accepts my claim that liberal thought seeks to constrain thumos, one might think that the same cannot be said for Machiavelli. For doesn't he encourage the greatest, the most virtuoso displays of human ambition? He does, among those he calls the great. But he clearly does not expect most human beings to be spirited at all. The great seek to oppress, he says. But the people merely seek to avoid oppression. Machiavelli suggests that, to avoid oppression, the people do everything they can to keep their heads down. They obey their rulers, whoever they may be. When rulers are evil, this leads to great tension and stress. How can the people accept tyrants who continuously oppress them? Machiavelli shows us that this tension is relieved by flights into fantasy. Only the few touch or grasp the true nature of the prince. Thus the people are easily fooled by the prince. Their belief in God's providence leads them to believe that their ruler's authority is sanctioned by God and that all is ultimately for the best. And, when worst comes to worst, the people take refuge in sweet thoughts of their heavenly reward, not to mention, less sweet thoughts of the suffering of the ambitious in hell.

On the surface, Machiavelli's analysis of the people might seem to be merely a restatement of the views of Plato and Aristotle, who held that a fundamental aim of the members of a polis is freedom. But there are important differences. Aristotle teaches—and the history of the polis shows—that the people are often willing to defend their freedom. When oppressed, they do not withdraw but, at least in a well ordered polis, fight for their freedom.

To understand the difference between Machiavelli and Plato and Aristotle, one must recognize that for all three philosophers no one is wholly lacking in thumos. While Plato suggests in books IV through VI of the *Republic* that there are people who are wholly motivated by appetitive desires and thus who will stop work when their minimal desires are satisfied, his account of the democratic and oligarchic regimes in book VIII shows that there is at least a minimal element of spiritedness in practically everyone. For the oligarchs seek to distinguish themselves by their accumulation of money while the democrats seek to conspicuously consume unnecessary goods. (The tyrant has a much greater admixture of thumos and seeks power so as to accumulate more goods and glory than anyone else.)

It is this element of spiritedness that leads the people in the ancient polis to fight for their freedom and to demand a share in political power. The modern people, as described by Machiavelli, are very different. Yet, we should probably recognize that they too, are motivated in part by thumos. Their spiritedness, however, is satisfied by their belief in their own goodness and thus their confidence that they will inherit the earth.

So, Machiavelli does not want to constrain the spiritedness of the great. But he does hold that the lesser spiritedness of the people is constrained by being diverted from this world to the next by Christianity. As we have seen, this diversion helps make the work of a tyrant—that is, for Machiavelli, any ruler—so much easier. For early moderns after Machiavelli, however, spiritedness is something to be constrained in all people. Nietzsche may overstate the case when he says that the last man is the outcome

of modern liberalism. The early moderns, in particular, continue to recognize, with Machiavelli, that spiritedness and ambition can be useful in, for example, the political movements that fought for and defended the rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke, for example, seems to rely on the "quarrelsome and contentious"—read spirited—few to warn the people against the depredations of governments bent on tyranny. Yet, there is no doubt that, by the standards of the ancient world, the modern very much sought to constrain and temper thumos. In this, they very much agreed with Augustine.

The Primacy of Peace

If cruelty is the greatest fear of modern liberal democrats, than peace is its greatest love. For nothing engenders human cruelty more than war. So, liberal democrats seek, first, civil peace and then, peace between states. Kant even imagines the possibility of perpetual peace, once all states are based upon liberal morality. And, in this case, the old idealist has turned out to be the great realist. For as Michael Doyle has pointed out, there have been no wars between liberal democracies. And, wars between liberal regimes of any kind are few and far between. Thomas Friedman was, it turned out, rash to say that not no two states that have the golden arches of McDonald's will ever fight a war against one another. But the NATO bombing of Serbia remains the sole exception.

In making peace the primary goal of politics, liberal democrats very much share the views of Augustine. And they differ from the Greeks, who simply could not conceive of a world without strife between one polis and another and between Greeks and barbarians.

I have said that moderns give primacy to peace. Of course, Machiavelli remains the great exception here as he does with regard to spiritedness. For Machiavelli, necessity leads to warfare. For he, like all previous Westerns thinkers takes it for granted that human conflict will always be with us. The reason, of course, is that there is a limited supply of goods. So, the only way a political community can gain enough to be able to turn their attention from mere survival to the higher ends in life is by taking from others. This is an old doctrine. Socrates says in *The Republic* that, to be more than a city of pigs, a polis must take land from others. And for the Israelites to gain the Promised Land, the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Philistines must lose their land. Similarly, slavery is unquestioned in the ancient world because it the only way in which an economic surplus can be generated, and the political and military ends of the ancient polis realized.

What distinguishes political theory after Machiavelli from all previous thought about political life is the possibility of economic growth. No longer is the supply of goods fundamentally limited. Instead, through ingenuity and effort, human beings can have more without taking from others. The new science allows us to conquer nature and thereby relieve man's estate. But it takes the right kind of political and social circumstances to encourage and sustain the efforts of human beings to work hard and smart. Peace and security is desired, by Hobbes and Locke, not just to avoid the ills of war but because human beings have no incentive to expand their production of goods when they have no hopes of enjoying those goods in the future. At the same time, however, once the expansion of industry begins, peace and security are easier to sustain. For economic growth allows us to raise ourselves above the pursuit of necessities without taking from others.

This whole line of thought is unknown to both Augustine and Machiavelli. (Machiavelli does suggest that human ingenuity can enable us to conquer nature and fortune, but he does not seem to recognize the potential for the growth of industry that Hobbes and Locke later see.) Yet, even here, Augustine and Machiavelli differ, in surprisingly similar ways, from the ancient acceptance of endless war.

Machiavelli teaches his princes and potential princes that to hold onto power, they must pacify and expand their state. Pacification requires cruelty. But, as Machiavelli makes clear in the famous example of Borgia and Remiro d'Orca, as well as elsewhere, cruelty well used is truly compassionate for it brings peace and security to the people. Further more, Machiavelli tells us that princes and republics must continually expand their state. The choice is to expand or be expanded upon. Now that might, at first, seem to be a recipe for unending war. But, if one prince or republic should be especially virtuous, in the Machiavellian sense, and conquer more and more lands, the result would be the expansion of peace over a wider territory. In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli makes it clear that a republic is more likely to accomplish this task then a principality.[15] And he even suggests the possibility of a long-lived, if not eternal republic, one that would bring peace to large parts of the world. So, Machiavelli, like any liberal, looks forward to world peace under what we might call the aegis of world government. He does not think that world peace is inevitable, and does not recognize the contribution that economic growth might bring to it. But Machiavelli does think it is possible. Only, for him, world government will not come through consent to international political authority or through international law but, rather, through conquest.[16]

A universal republic is surely difficult to achieve. The Roman republic is the nearest example. Yet, not only did it fall, but the empire was never entirely pacified. What makes a universal republic more likely in Machiavelli's time than in earlier times, however, is Christianity. For, as we have seen, Christianity is a tremendous weapon in the hands of rulers who profess to be Christians but ignore the teachings of this religion. It constrains the spiritedness of the people, which is, of course, the source of political independence. And, because it gives primacy to peace, it encourages people to render unto Caesar that which is his.

Christianity, then, encourages peace by encouraging passivity. That it does this is, however, no accident. While Augustine certainly did not welcome the insincere religious observance on the part of political leaders that is a hallmark of Machiavellianism, he did call on Christians to accept the power of the Roman Emperor or any other political leader God has entrusted with power. For, Augustine like Machiavelli looks to submission to authority as the guarantor of political stability and empire as the best hope for peace.

Equality

It should be obvious that the egalitarianism of modern thought—the distinctively modern concern for the well-being of the common man—reflects the egalitarianism of Biblical religion, an egalitarianism that originally flourishes in the Hebrew Bible and that becomes more powerful in Christianity once it is freed from the hierarchical tendencies Christianity learned from ancient Greek thought.

Ideology

The ideological character of modern thought—the distinctively modern attempt to make philosophy practical in part by teaching the people certain truths of philosophy—is prefigured by the Christian emphasis on faith. Nothing like ideology—or Christian faith—can be found in the polis.

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[15] A republic is better than a principality for a number of reasons. First, it allows for a variety of leaders with different kinds of skills to come to power in the appropriate circumstances. When on leader better suited for the times replaces another, a polity has found a way to compensate for for the inability of individuals to adjust to the times. Second, the competition between elites for support of the people stimulates republics to be aggressive.

[16] Compare this to Machiavelli's understanding of the liberation of Italy which, he implies, would require the conquest of Italy by one Italian power. He was, of course, right about this.

There are, of course, a number of reasons that political and social life in the West has been so racked by ideological dispute and by political movements motivated in no small part by ideology. The great modern ideologies have been used since the Puritan and French Revolutions to mobilize and motivate the masses of people who, for the first time in Western history since the decline of the ancient polis, play an ongoing role in politics. It is also plausible to think that the difficulties and complexities of political and social life will always call forth a simplified, and perhaps ideological, understanding of politics. For these ideologies do help people choose among different movements, candidates, and parties.[17] But there are a lot of ways in which our political choices can be simplified. That we assume that all political questions can be answered in terms of some overarching theoretical perspective is, in large part, the result of the modern conception of theory and practice. Given that conception, we take it for granted that any serious political dispute—any dispute that involves, say, something more than the pursuit of economic benefits for ourselves—must ultimately reflect deep theoretical differences about the ends and goals of political life. For, in the absence of such theoretical divergence, it would seem that reasonable people should find it relatively easy to settle our disputes. Moreover, given the impetus to certainty and consensus in modern thought, we moderns all have a deep desire to both legitimate our political preferences and bring political struggle to an end. So we organize our political thought in ideological terms. We look for deep connections between one particular dispute and another and find them rooted in opposing conceptions of political and moral life. We start movements devoted to these ideals, movements that often demonize our opponents and seek to overcome their presumably selfish, if not evil, opposition to our own projects. Our political movements typically spend a great deal of energy in the struggle of self-definition as one or another tendency claims to stand for the theoretically pure ideals of the movement as a whole. They aim, at least at first, at radical change, at some kind of transformation of our political and social life. We seek to convince our fellow citizens to think in our own terms and then to join us in making over our political and social life. And then, we expect that political and moral conflict of this dramatic sort will come to an end as the truth of our ideology is recognized by all.

Now one can deny that ideological conflict is a distinctively modern phenomenon. This, however, would be to stretch the notion of ideology too far. Political dispute we shall always have with us. But the kind of dispute that revolves around deeply conflicting political and moral ideals is, in its fullest form, a rather new phenomenon. Oligarchs and democrats might well seek changes in the polis in which they lived. But neither the rich nor the poor called the polis itself into question. Rather their disputes were over whether political power, and the benefits that went with it, were rightly distributed given the contributions of each group to the polis as a whole. While compromise between the oligarchs and democrats was sometimes difficult, there were no fundamentally different conceptions of the aims of the polis standing in the way of mutual agreement. And thus Aristotle could point out to the poor that they, too, valued and depended on the wealth of the rich, while telling the rich that their political independence was impossible if the poor did not serve in the military. Thucydides does have Pericles point to the ease and freedom of Athenian life in contrast to the rigors of life under the Spartan regime. But, in doing so, Pericles appeals much more to the customs of the Athenians than to any theory of political and moral life. And, while the Funeral Oration is set at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the Spartan threat to Athens is not understood in ideological terms. If all that separated Athens and Sparta were their different regimes—which were not all that different—there is no reason to think that war between them would have been inevitable.

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17. Survey research has long indicated that a more ideological understanding of political is largely found in the most educated and politically involved strata of the population. But the evidence of recent years suggests that many people, at least in America, are turned off by ideological disputes that offer them oversimplified and implausible alternatives. See for example, E J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*. In their distaste for ideological disputes, the American people as a whole may be a great deal more sophisticated than the chattering classes, including most academics who, in my view, are much too quick to understand any political dispute in ideological or party terms.

Much the same could be said for the earlier wars between the Greeks and the Persians. Here we do have a more dramatic difference in political and social organization. Still the struggle is not ideological in nature. The Persians do not seek to convert the Greeks to their form of political and social organization but to conquer and extract tribute from them. And the alliance of Greek poleis seeks only to defend their independence. Neither Greek nor Persian can imagine themselves adopting the way of life of the other. Thus they do not devote much effort to defending their own way of life and attacking the alternatives to it. They simply assume that their way is best.

So the relatively atheoretical character of the Greek life makes for little ideological conflict between one polis and another. And, together with their insularity, it kept the conflict between Greeks and Persians from becoming ideological in nature. Something akin to ideological conflict, it would seem, develops only in the world of the Biblical religion, not that of Greek philosophy. The Hebrew Bible presents the view of Jews who were distinctly conscious of their difference from the polytheists who lived around them.[18] Though these differences are not stated in theoretical terms, the difference in the worldview of Jew and non-Jew is apparent to all. And the various stories of intermarriage and broken marriages, of alliance and warfare, between Jews and non-Jews, suggest that a further, necessary condition for ideological conflict had also developed: the contending views exercised some appeal to those from the other shore. Living sometimes together and sometimes apart, Jews and non-Jews came, whether willingly or not, to learn about, and in some cases, appreciate the religion of the other. Polytheism evidently appealed to some Jews, as no doubt the religion of Israel appealed to some polytheists. So, for reasons both religious and political, efforts began among Jews to speak to and against the other. And, these ideological differences were at times expressed politically in both violent and non-violent struggle.

The tension between Israelites and the other nations in Canaan, like that between Jew and Roman (and later, Christian and Roman), was ideological, but only from the point of view of one of the contestants. Adherents of the more relaxed and open polytheistic religions were not threatened by what were to them the curious practices of a relatively small number of Jews.[19] (The Canaanites were, of

18. I shall throughout his section speak of Jews although, I mean to refer to the Israelites who left Egypt, whose descendants were united under Kings David and Solomon and who then were divided into the Kingdoms of Israel and Judea.

19. Until a century or so after Jesus, when Christianity began to win more than a handful of adherents, the Roman pagans were more or less indifferent to Christianity. Later some pagans took note of and condemned the practices of Jews and Christians. But pagans generally did not see Jews or Christians as a *threat* because they practiced a different religion. That a pagan converted to Judaism or Christianity did not, for most pagans, call the pagan religious practices into question. This is true, in part, because Judaism and Christianity appealed to only a small minority of the people. (And in many places Christianity appealed most to the poor, and women.) In addition, while Judaism and Christianity do call the pagan gods into question, these claims were, it seems, not terribly troubling to pagans. The Romans, like the Greeks, were tolerant of disputes about the nature and existence of the various Gods. There were various mythological stories about the Gods. But, there was no pagan creed and one could believe any or all or none of these stories and yet be committed to the pagan rites. The gods were not taken all that seriously by some pagans while others devoted themselves to one or another of the various mystery rites. Diversity in belief and practice was expected. Thus pagans took it for granted that each polis and each people might have and worship their own gods and might not credit the gods of Rome as the Romans did. And, while they would have looked askance at the claim that there is only one God and that the other gods were false, many Roman pagans thought that there might be a supreme god. This god they could identify with the God of the Jews and the Christians while associating their own lesser gods with the angels Christians and some Jews talked about. So long as all these disputes did not call into question the civic rites of Rome itself, no one was especially troubled. Each person and group could believe what he or she wished about the gods or God. And they could practice whatever religious rituals did not conflict with the public order. To fail to sacrifice to the gods of the city, however, did conflict with the public order. For these rites served to protect Rome from the anger of the gods, whoever or whatever they were. And they

course, threatened by the political aims of the Jews, but that is a different matter.) And the Romans would not have been so exercised by Christians, had the latter, relatively new religion not, as a matter of principle, refused even the most minimal acknowledgment of the gods of Rome. Two-sided ideological conflict arose with the struggles between Jews and Christians over the inheritance of the religious tradition from which they both grew. More than anything seen in earlier times, this conflict was one waged with intellectual weapons that drew upon systematic, and, for religions that are fundamentally oriented to history rather than theology, surprisingly theoretical thinking. It was a conflict that displayed the characteristic energy and intolerance of ideological politics. The claims Jews and Christians made at this time could not both be true. So, their arguments did call into question the religious practices and beliefs of each other. Moreover, for a member of one religious group to convert to the other not only disrupted the lives of families that were tied to religious practices, but, seemed to threaten the survival of each religion.

At the same time that the intellectual edifice of Christianity was developed in the theology of the Church Fathers, Christianity grew most rapidly amongst the poor and the displaced and, especially, among women. And, thus Christianity began to display another central feature of ideological politics, its capacity to mobilize the masses of people, even, or especially when the people had previously been excluded from political life.

While new elements of what I call ideological politics came to dominate the conflict between Jew and Christian, some of them soon fell away. With the Christian conversion of Rome—an ideological conquest, to be sure—the new institutional resources of the established Church made the mobilization of the people less necessary. And then ideological struggles had to be won by the Church against the various religious beliefs that we call today call heresies. Once they were won, Christian unity muted ideological conflict. This unity was never complete. But it was dominant enough that ideological struggle is hard for us to find after that unity largely came into being. In the Middle Ages there were important political differences, most especially, Emperor and Pope. But, taking place as they did within a framework of thought all accepted, it is hard to see any ideological impetus in these struggles. Only with the collapse of Christian unity does ideology, in the form of the various Protestant movements, arise. And, while Princes often invoked Protestantism for their own purposes, religious commitment carried its own weight—and not just with the Princes. At different times, Protestant sects began to organize those who lived below the noble ranks. And as time went on, and people became ever freer from the fixed ranks of medieval political and social life—and religious conflicts grew more severe—some people became even more dedicated to a way of life that gave them the only fixed points in an otherwise changing and uncertain world. Protestantism, particularly in its puritan form in England and Geneva, became a revolutionary

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served as a central means of expressing political allegiance to Rome and to the Emperor. It was the Christian failure to observe these rites that lead to their persecution. Unlike the Jews, Christians did not have a long history, rooted in antiquity to support their claim for exemption from these rites. Religious claims of an ancient vintage carried weight with the Romans. Whatever the excessive nature of their claims for their God, the Jews were an old people whose God might be well worth propitiating. Christianity, despite its claims to worship the God of the Jews, was a new religion. And the claim of Christians to worship the God of the Jews was undercut by their polemical attack on the Jewish rituals. So Christians seemed doubly disloyal. Still, it was not until Nero looked for scapegoats for the burning of Rome that the empire actively looked to find and persecute Christians. (And even then, Christians could save their lives by eating a piece of meat from a ritual sacrifice.) Nero's action legitimated the persecution of Christians. But subsequent persecutions still remained haphazard and opportunistic. And, the extent of persecution was, to no small extent, determined by the willingness and, in some cases, the eagerness of Christians to martyr themselves. Though we should not blame the victim, it is still fair to note that protests against the persecution of Christians dramatically increased the number of Christians who were persecuted.

For a very interesting, if somewhat discursive account of the paganism and Christianity, on which I have drawn, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*.

movement.[20] And it was supported—and not just led—by people whose lives are wholly shaped by the religious beliefs and practices and conflicts to which they are dedicated. The last element, but one, of a distinctively modern ideological politics, has arrived.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

We can see, then, that while modernity in many ways breaks with Christian doctrines it, at the same time is profoundly influenced by important tendencies in Christian thought. Modernity's conception of human nature, its politics of fear, its constraint of spiritedness, its pursuit of peace, its promotion of equality and its ideological character all reflect Chistian ideas that profoundly break with ancient thought and practice.

But what difference does it make if we tell one or another story about the development of Western civilization? There is no question, here, of getting at the truth of the matter. We can always find similarities and differences between any two tendencies of thought. Thus any tale we tell about the growth of the West will highlight certain comparisons and contrasts and put others in the background. So, the test of a new way of looking at the various lines of thought that make up our civilization is ultimately pragmatic. What can we learn from casting our spotlight in one direction rather than another? What useful knowledge can we gain from emphasizing one set of similarities rather than another? How can we be helped to deal with the tensions in our time by getting a fresh perspective on the ideas that give shape to our lives?

I hope it is evident that this new narrative does enable us to highlight features of the various traditions and writers we study, features that remain hidden in the old narrative. Beyond that here are three quick takes on why we might want to have an alternative to the story of the great tradition at our disposal.

The Upshot I: Modernity, the Ancients and Christianity

A first result of this different perspective on our history is that the distinctiveness of modernity is seen in a new light. Though modern thought by and large rejects many Christian ideas, it draws on still others. But the attitude of modern thought to the ancients is much less ambiguous. The modern rejection of Platonic and Aristotelian is more far reaching and more decisive than its rejection of Christianity.

Indeed, the perspective I have defended in this paper helps us understand a peculiarity of history that has been hidden in plain sight: the relative ease with which Christianity has accommodated itself to modernity. Or, to look at things from the reverse angle, we can talk about the ease with which modernity can make use of Christianity.

We do not often enough wonder at the how Christianity has accommodated itself to liberalism. How is it that a religion could serve both the Holy Roman Empire and the United States of America? Of course, Christianity has dramatically changed during that time. But is it not surprising that it survived at all? Surely we need some account of how this happened. Moreover, such an account must do more than explain how the Protestant revolution contributed to development of the modern world. No doubt the disenchantment of the world characteristic of the enlightenment is prefigured by Protestantism's insistence on the utter transcendence of God over this fallen world. And the individualism and egalitarianism of liberalism is prefigured by the individualist conscience of Protestantism. But, as Michael Walzer has pointed out, the more radical versions of Protestantism are ideologies of transition

20. I draw on Michael Walzer's *The Revolution of the Saints* here and elsewhere in this section.

that arise during that moment men and women must contain the anxiety that arises with the break down of the old, hierarchical regime. Christianity does not die away once that transition is over, however. It continues to dominate the lives of many and, in the United States, most citizens. It is transformed, no doubt. But still we must ask how it still speaks to us and how it survives the critical stance of the founder of modernity.

Through out this paper I have taken it for granted that the founders of modernity broke in critical ways with Christian doctrine. Yet, one can find interpreters of Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke who see each of them as Christians, albeit of a rather unusual sort. And, even those interpreters of the founders of modernity who agree with my assessment of their religious sentiments hold that, Machiavelli aside, they were reluctant to advertise the ways in which they depart from Biblical religion. Now we are perhaps in a better position to understand that reluctance. For, in ways we have seen, the founders of modernity not only took over Christian themes and attitudes, but sought to make use of the Christianity they transformed for their own purposes. Fear of this worldly power and of God, an emphasis on peace, constraints on spiritedness and distance from politics, and the demand for equality all serve liberal politics.

Indeed it is not entirely wrong to claim that liberal politics serve Christian ideals as well. Yet, we cannot pursue this thought long before we realize just how far modern liberal democracy takes us from the center of Christianity. The liberal democratic emphasis on this worldly happiness, on material well being, on sensual pleasure, and, above all, on the freedom of thought and action that make all of the above possible, encourages a way of life that is profoundly contrary to the teachings of Christianity. Modernity may have learned the uses of theory from Christianity. But modern theories of life and morality fundamentally diverge from those of Christianity.

For all their talk of God, there is little doubt that the founders of modernity hoped to shift human attention from the next world to this one. And there is also little doubt that the philosopher most responsible for liberal democratic thought, Locke, would support, at least in broad outline, the freedom and economic growth that is characteristic of our age.

So the Pope and Jerry Falwell are both quite right when they point to the ungodly features of the world we live in. And yet both the Pope and Jerry Falwell say that a Lockean political community best serves Christianity and that Christianity provides the best defense of Lockean human rights.

Now, one can certainly give good Augustinian reasons for accepting our contemporary way of life as the best we can hope for and as the form of political community in which to best work out the tensions between the city of man and the city of God. Given Augustine's insistence on the importance of this worldly peace and security, one can argue that Christian accommodation with liberal democracy is well justified. Indeed, who could fail to believe that our world is closer to Augustine's desires than that found in the last days of the Roman Empire?

It is well to remember, however, that while Augustinian realism would lead a Christian to support liberal democratic politics, it would lead him to oppose the kinds of souls that liberal democratic life does so much to create. From the standpoint of the city of god, the virtue of the city of man in our time is that it provides the peace and freedom in which those who preach the truth can combat the spiritual malaise that a true Christian can't help seeing as an affliction.

It is the story of Great Tradition upset by modernity and liberalism that points to the various ways in which Christianity is at tension with modern liberalism. The different story I tell in this paper helps

understand why the breakdown of the Great Tradition has so often been inspired, or aided and abetted, by those who call themselves Christians.

The Upshot II: Plato and Aristotle without Christianity; Christianity without Plato and Aristotle

Once we see the ways in which distinctive features of Christian thought lead to modernity and liberalism—and away from Greek philosophy—we might, finally, be able to read the Greeks and the Christian philosophers in their own terms. We might actually read the great Christian theologians, Augustine and Aquinas, without assuming that they are simply an amalgam of Greek philosophy and Biblical religion.[21] And, freed from its place in the great tradition, we can read Plato and Aristotle without Christian blinders.

Let me suggest three ways in which this can help us get a clearer view of their works. First, it might help us better grasp their distinctive view of philosophy as a way of life—indeed, the best way of life—rather than a set of doctrines. Too often we read Plato and Aristotle as presenting doctrines that must be accepted if we are to call ourselves Platonists or Aristotelians. I suggest, however, that while the metaphysical doctrines that Aristotle, and even more so, Plato put forward so very tentatively are quite distinctive, even more distinctive, and important, is the account of the nature and good of the philosophic life they both defend and of the ethical life that Aristotle defends. These views are, I believe, defensible quite apart from the metaphysical doctrines in which Plato and Aristotle enfold them. Indeed, while many traditional interpretations of the Greeks hold that their political and ethical ideas rest on their metaphysical and epistemological commitments, I would suggest, instead, those metaphysical and epistemological ideas are meant to explain the political and ethical ideas which Plato and Aristotle found plausible independent of any first philosophy. Indeed the power of these political and moral ideas views rest, I believe, on a certain skepticism about the possibility of reaching any metaphysical conclusions. After all, the philosophic life would come to an end if we attained broad agreement about the final truth of any and all metaphysical and scientific theories.

Second, we will find it easier to see that Plato and Aristotle, in different ways, see a stark gap between theory and practice if we recognize that the idea of political theory as a blueprint for political reform arises long after them and, is, I think, given its canonical form only in Christian political thought. In other works, I have pointed out that the ideological moment in political theory has passed. It might be easier to understand what a post-ideological political philosophy would look like if we more clearly recognized the pre-ideological character of ancient thought. And that is easier to grasp if we understand ancient philosophy on its own terms, apart from Christian theology.

Third, as I have argued elsewhere, we will have a better grasp of the Platonic notions of sex and eros, if we recognize that the Augustinian attitude toward our bodily desires is vastly different from that found in Plato.[22]

[21] I am as guilty of this as anyone. I had a choice of answering questions about either Augustine or Aquinas during my Ph. D. general examination. I chose Aquinas and, in response to Harvey C. Mansfield's questions about Aquinas, I gave answers drawn from my knowledge of Aristotle. I only got stumped when Professor Mansfield asked "how does Aquinas bring original sin into his account of human nature?" I stammered for a moment and then said "I don't know." Professor Mansfield then gracefully rescued me by saying that he wasn't sure Aquinas knew either.

[22] I have addressed this issue in "Civilization and Its Contents: Platonic Reflection on the Culture Wars" which is available at my web site.

The Upshot III: Complexity in History; Triangulation in Politics

I have made an effort in this paper to give us a more complex way of looking at the relationship of Christianity to both Plato and Aristotle, one the one hand, and early modern philosophy, on the other. Along the way, however, I have also suggested that there are further complexities to which we should attend. There is, for example, Greek philosophy other than that found in the work of Plato and Aristotle. If we were to compare Xenophon with Christian and modern thought, we would certainly reach different conclusions. And there are many Christianities, as well. There is Aquinas's Christianity, which, I have suggested, is in many ways closer to the Plato and Aristotle than Augustinian Christianity. And there are other Christian traditions as well, including those of the early Church Fathers who rejected Plato and Aristotle in much more striking ways than Augustine.

There are also different strains in modern, liberal thought. I have been emphasizing the way in which Christian themes and attitudes are taken over into modern liberalism. But there are other important schools of modern thought that owe much less to Christianity and much more to Greek thought in its pre-Christian form. Indeed, one modern school of historiography has argued that the tradition of thought that most influenced the American founding is that of civic humanism. These historians trace the tradition of civic humanism, by way of Machiavelli, back to Greek thought. I have some qualms about this historiography, both in that I think it overstates the importance of civic humanism in the American founding and wholly misunderstand how Machiavelli is radically different from the other thinkers in that tradition. And I would argue that, in the generation of the founders, the civic humanist tradition was usually understood to be consonant with rather than a competitor to the liberal tradition.[23] Still, the very existence of this important strand of thought, which influences many later moment in our history, points to the importance of opening our eyes to the importance of alternative narratives of our intellectual trajectory.

If we break up the hegemony of the Great Tradition narrative, we may find it easier to recognize other ways of combining disparate traditions. In particular, many of us who today who call ourselves civic republicans or communitarians draw from the civic humanist ideas and, at the same time, believe that there are ways of combining Greek ideas of political community with a liberal emphasis on human rights. Many liberals, however, find Greek thought threatening and dangerous, precisely because they think that human rights and a broad tolerance for people different from us is incompatible with a political community that encourages a particular view of the good life. My suggestion, however, is that Greek thought is more threatening to rights, tolerance, and diversity when allied with what I called the ideological character of Christianity that is by itself. The more skeptical and tentative side of Greek thought—the side of Greek thought that Christianity neglects—is far more compatible with the fallibilism and openness to diversity that characterizes modern liberalism at its best. At the same time, once we see that Biblical egalitarianism is a precursor of liberalism that can be used to support the idea of human rights, we learn that there are ways to recast pre-modern ideas in ways that support the modern project. Perhaps a new turn in Christian thought can be used to support the communitarian and civic humanist project of reforming the liberal way of life.

Breaking down the Great Tradition narrative, then, helps us recognize that there are many ways to combine the disparate the traditions that make up Western political and moral thought. And thus it helps us recognize possibilities for our future that we might have otherwise overlooked.

[23] And I would also point that Machiavelli fits uncomfortably within this civic humanist tradition.

Conclusion

My claim, then, is not that the great tradition is a fable. Rather, it is that there are other, equally plausible stories to tell about how the modern thought relates to that which came before it. Modernity can be seen not just as a break with the Great Tradition but as being heavily influenced by Biblical religion once the Christian focus on the next world is given up. But that, of course, is also to say that Christianity and modernity are decisively different. Christianity stands by itself and apart from both the ancients and the moderns. It plays a distinctive role in the Western tradition. To understand that tradition, we must grasp this distinctive role—and the many attempts to hide it. In doing so, we can better understand the various ways in which the three broad traditions that make up Western thought have been brought together in the past, and how they might be brought together in new ways in the future.