

## **COSMOLOGY without HEADACHES**

(Lecture Series)

*(compiling, transcribing, researching, editing always in progress)*

### **LECTURE XII: What Did God Have to Do with It? What is the Renaissance? The Protestant Reformation; New Political Theory for a New Cosmos**

Judaic-style monotheism brought a disconcerting rule of behavior that caused a lot of trouble for the 'chosen people,' especially distrust from societies beyond the tribes of Israel. It was one thing to worship a single god, but this particular god required that they show no respect to the gods of others. As Christianity arose from the same traditions and accepted the Old Testament as the Word of God, they ran into the same difficulty. They were actually forbidden by God, as part of their covenant with Him, to recognize the gods of others in any way. It is, in fact, the very first commandment given to Moses. God had put his believers in a bind. It was bad enough that Jews could not assimilate in other cultures, they often were required to practically declare themselves enemies, albeit at least temporarily inert. That was bad enough, but for the new 'Christian-Jews,' with the added element of proselytizing: taking upon themselves a mission to spread the gospel (thus to save the souls of the heathen), they were bound to be noticed in the pagan world, and to stir up animosity. Why was God so hard on his followers? Was it really jealousy of fairies and myths and the worship of beasts of His own creation or golden calves and icons of clay and stone? Or did He consider that His clan needed adversity to solidify their faith? Some suffering, perhaps, would serve to intensify their zeal.

This one-god concept is also behind all the blood shed over heretical disputes between Christians themselves—Muslims, too. How exactly we were to conceive of God and thus how to worship him became problems of great contention. This was intensified by a kind of unsettled middle position as to whether God was immanent or remote.

Pagan traditions (to be considered if early proselytizers were to have success at spreading the gospel) clearly understood most gods to be 'in the world,' even if hidden. They lived *here*; they were reachable; they affected the real world—even if, in some cases, only indirectly by using us—even if they often opposed one another (meaning wisdom could have many faces). And, although their purposes might be contradictory to ours, they could be influenced by sacrifice and prayer; tears of anguish or paroxysms of anger over some injustice (natural or man-made); or something as simple as mere groveling. The choice of worship style depended heavily on the perceived character of the deity entreated. They did not give laws to men by which to live. How could they? They had no apparent sense of justice themselves but acted on whim, limited only by the type and range of their personal powers vis-à-vis other gods and spirits.

Another sort of gods are remote, 'beyond-the-world': gods of cosmic creation (e.g., Kronos, who, after completing his work was defeated by his own creation); or a god-force which steps aside after creating, leaving daily maintenance to lower gods—or demons—until the world corrodes and the Creator decides to annihilate or renovate it. Later we will find Newton leaving God's mechanism to laws of physics: laws divivable by science—essentially the position of Deists, a popular theology among intellectuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (including some of the American founding fathers—Thomas Jefferson, best known among them, who even wrote a Deistic interpretation of the Bible.)

The God of the Hebrew Bible was a radical departure from views rampant in the ancient world, a deity sufficiently durable as to last to the present. As the One God, He stands astride both positions: transcendent *and* immanent. He is not really in the world, but exists (at least partly) in another dimension so that He can hear and see us and even lean our way and directly interfere from time to time, should He be moved to do so—usually by anger or disgust. He generally governs the world by natural laws. But on a whim, to serve some purpose of His own or punish human injustice (stemming ironically from His generous gift of free will), He can miraculously interrupt the working of natural laws. To avoid having to constantly interfere in the human world (a world which would come to rely on Him too much for solutions to its problems and to judge human affairs), He found it advantageous, perhaps, to add laws of behavior (commands, that is, to the direct recipients; strong recommendations for the rest of mankind) and then, through His Son, a promise of immortality to those who would listen and obey. From this first code of laws directly from God has emerged the concept of political theology—i.e., the religious underpinnings of civil laws: scripture utilized as kind of heavenly Engineer’s scale by which legislation and the mettle of the legislator himself could be measured.

Generally, the Christian view has God seeking to establish, beyond the brotherhood of Hebrews, the brotherhood of man. (‘Seeking’? Why doesn’t He just enforce it—*will* it? Because in doing so He would be renegeing on *free* will—by far the most interesting of His gifts to humanity.) Beings with free will need to be convinced, not forced. With that in mind, God sent His Son, the Christ, to reinterpret and generalize the political theology He had imposed on the Hebrews. His wrath, while real and still to be feared, was a result of His love—so deep that He was willing to forgive men their sins: their lust, their greed, and their injustices, if only they would request it by prayer and by renunciation of their sinful lives, thus indicating belief in the immanence of God the Son and faith in His remote Father. By this means He altered His image from a fearsome tyrant God to a loving, caring, parent: God the Father (still basically tyrannical, but now also beneficent: punishing only failure to obey laws He has laid down for our own good, for the salvation of our immortal souls) wanting only to be loved and respected in return.

It is clear that Jesus remade God, not in the likeness of Man (as men had already made God: in the likeness of the strongest—a wrathful deity controlling the world by fear), but in the likeness of the ‘good’ man; the honorable man, the sensitive and forgiving man—a man much like Jesus himself. Was Jesus, then, an ideal man of perhaps an ideal future? Probably not. He was more like a contemporary man who lived through life in a manner worthy of salvation. Probably not all would follow. The world might not change at all. But a few would be saved. At some time in the future, God the Father would see to it that the world would be remade [City of God?] by returning Jesus as its king—until later generations came to understand that He would not be coming as soon as once expected, and His kingdom, thus, was removed to heaven.

So God became good and just and attentive and a rather nice God; a humane God, if one doesn’t cross him—and even then, a merciful and forgiving God (an all knowing God would have to have inexhaustible patience), but nonetheless almighty and perfectly just—even loving. Paradoxical as these things may seem to our paltry powers of reason, they are explained by that very means: our inability to comprehend the ways of God—and how dare we even think to question Him or presume to know anything about Him? On the other hand, we must know *something* about Him if we expect to please Him.

It is from the all-knowing God, interested in human affairs, that we get guidance as to how to relate human to human, children to parent, ruled to ruler. God generally rules through nature; the state is a natural extension of the family and tribe, and thus it, too, becomes a sacred thing—and, *voilà*: political theology. Such a God, however, is not a puppeteer. His expectations are transmitted through imperfect men and are subject to generations of reinterpretation and a multitude of translations. The ‘true’ political theology (if it exists), is thus obscured. It becomes debatable, and conflicting versions cause more than consternation. The supernatural level of importance (salvation or damnation of immortal souls) leads to deep and unbridgeable divisions; accusations of heresy; sincere attempts to purify the corrupt (attempts which tend toward extreme measures and in turn corrupt even the righteous); violent conflict in the ultimate selection of a winner, presumably chosen by God through these ordeals, and so the most terrible evil and falsification is fostered through the sincere struggle to attain the good and true.

It is this paradox that leads one to wonder whether monotheism is, as most moderns have supposed, actually an advantage over the perhaps more natural polytheism and pantheism of ancient cultures. The Pagan gods generally did not compel warfare, though they often predicted it, and intervened in it on one side or the other, even vying with each other by backing opposing champions. But they mainly busied themselves at turning each other into trees and statues and various and sundry monsters or locking one another into constellations. The acceptance of monotheism, instead of resulting in a relatively harmless choice between equally unlikely and impotent pagan spirits, forces a much harder choice—an ultimate choice—between the politically/theologically correct version of God or damnation. And the damned, surely, must not be allowed to corrupt the social fabric and possibly taint the souls of the otherwise saved.

Presuming a particular version could win out by force (certainly by eradicating all other versions of God), His gift of free will would thus be cancelled—in effect by the rejection of that concept by the intended receivers, thus thwarting God’s plan to let each man decide his own fate. Since a final version—the perfect state; a city of man finally matching the City of God—is logically impossible, continual conflict and confusion and misery in such a ‘system’ (if it can be called such) is guaranteed. As we have seen, this is exactly what went on for centuries, until a clever Florentine public servant on the one hand, and the founders of the Protestant Reformation on the other, found ways to deflect the Western mind from futile concerns over the perfectibility of man.

This Florentine pointed out that humans are no good by nature and it is hopeless to try to fix them; they can only be manipulated (if you know what you are doing).

The new churches, influenced by the eternal flux in governments; the sordid corruption of ecclesiastics, right up to the pontiff himself; and the general failure of Catholicism to channel the true Will of God, maintained not only that individuals could and should deal directly with God for their psychological well being, but also that God expects neither moral perfection from such wretches as are humans, nor a virtuous state. Man could never be worthy of salvation. God only expects humans to have faith in Him.

Before we examine this sea change, let us mull over the concept of the Renaissance, itself. We have seen the glow in the pre-dawn sky of central Europe provided by the scholastics, whose efforts centered mainly in Paris. Now we will move south to find the first glimpse of the sun itself, in Florence. It is Florence, says Paul Oskar Kristeller [RENAISSANCE THOUGHT II; Harper, 1965] that is the hub of the Early Renaissance,

producing Dante (who some believe started it all with his 'Divine Comedy') and the humanists and **Ficino's** Platonic Academy (and others of lesser reputation) and harbored some of the greatest artists of all time.

**Dante Alighieri [1265?-1321]**

### **Renaissance Humanism:**

The great hope of St. Thomas was that reason would support faith or turn belief (opinion) into truth (knowledge); that pagan philosophy could be alloyed with the Catholic version of revelation, and so, by resolving all such conflict, lay the foundations for something like the City of God. This hope collapsed when it was finally realized that holding faith up to the measure of reason gave reason the advantage. It was Duns Scotus who finally put the torch to Scholasticism when he flatly rejected reason with the hope of saving faith – not far from the spirit of St. Bernard, who actually discouraged the idea of education *per se* in order to favor the continuity of untrammelled (and ignorant) belief.

It is easy to see a socio-political element in this view. Judeo-Christian revelation includes morality: a code of behavior, along with rewards for following it; a ticket to paradise; a code also enforced (particularly in the New Testament) by pain of eternal damnation. Thus Christianity, with its centralized spiritual authority to arbitrate and settle disputes over scriptural interpretation, promised social stability through political and religious unity. That this would include the silencing of political dissidents, atheistic philosophers, and troublesome heretics was seen as an advantage rather than a problem by defenders of the faith.

The Church, however, was in chaos. The two popes (with the 'Babylonian Captivity'), having excommunicated each other, soon became three (Council of Pisa naming the Cardinal of Milan as Pope Alexander V). Benedict XIII (having fled from Avignon to Spain) and Gregory XII (in Rome) refused either to appear at the council or to resign the papacy. Alexander was to call another general council, but he died before it could convene. His group of supporting cardinals elected John XXIII. He was Baldassare Cossa, and he had been papal vicar of Bologna. Governing that city "like a *condottiere*, with absolute and unscrupulous power," says Will Durant:

...he had taxed everything, including prostitution, gambling, and usury; according to his secretary, he had seduced two hundred virgins, matrons, widows, and nuns. But he was a man of precious ability in politics and war; he had accumulated great wealth, and commanded a force of troops personally loyal to him; perhaps he could conquer the Papal States from Gregory, and reduce Gregory to impecunious submission.

But John, perhaps fearing that all three popes would be dethroned to clear the schism, clung to his one-third of Catholic authority and did not call the council until pressed by the new (uncrowned but generally acknowledged) Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund. Sigismund arranged for the council to be held in Constance to avoid Italian intimidation and invited pretty much all of European nobility. So many responded that the Council was delayed for nearly half-a-year while they gathered. Even so, When the Council of Constance was opened (Nov.5, 1414) only a fraction of the invitees had arrived.



Where normally Constance had sheltered some six thousand inhabitants, it now successfully housed and fed not only some five thousand delegates to the Council, but to attend to their wants, a host of servants, secretaries, pedlars, physicians, quacks, minstrels, and fifteen hundred prostitutes.

The backers of both of the other popes conspired to blackmail John, threatening to reveal the sins and crimes of his past life. They offered to withhold such evidence if he would agree to join both Benedict and Gregory in abdication. He did so agree, but then changed his mind and fled from the town disguised as a groom. He then renounced his promise, saying it had been forced from him. Since the agreement had been abrogated, the other 'popes' also refused to resign, and so the three pontiffs held the stage. Ultimately, the Council deposed John and Benedict, Gregory having voluntarily abdicated, allowing it to appoint, at last, a new pope, Martin V, and the Great Schism was finally over. The Council of Constance had lasted three years, and the Church was badly in need of reform. Instead, a German envoy to Rome said:

Greed reigns supreme in the Roman court, and day by day finds new devices ... for extorting money from Germany under pretext of ecclesiastical fees. Hence much outcry ... and heartburnings; ... also many questions in regard to the papacy will arise, or else obedience will at last be entirely renounced, to escape from these outrageous exactions of the Italians; and this latter course, as I perceive; would be acceptable to many countries.

[Above 3 quotes are from Durant: THE RENAISSANCE, ch.XIV; *Crisis in the Church: 1378-1447*]

The Church was definitely in crisis and deeply shamed and in no shape to continue playing the shepherd of Christianity.

The Western mind, however, had roused itself from a long night. It would not be so easily convinced that a return to sleep in Christ's dreamy pasture should be preferred to this bright new morning and this vital wakefulness. But how to proceed? Would it be wise to follow in the train of reason alone? Pagan philosophy had never solved the problem of the universal 'good.' Based purely on reason, what constituted virtue was still questionable. Goals set by men for themselves, to be achieved during one's lifetime, seemed arbitrary and conflicting in comparison to the idea of reuniting with God at the moment of death. Reliable guidance seemed unavailable in deciding on a purpose or judging its worth; nor was there agreement on how to go about achieving such aims—What was worthy; What was suitable; What was right? I.e., there exists no solely rationally established code of behavior. The Western mind was newly opened to vice as well as virtue; anarchy as well as cooperation; might as well as right.

When one is faced with an unfamiliar landscape, it is not advisable to simply start walking through it with high hopes, unarmed, and singing songs of freedom. Some preparation is warranted. Are there existing trails? What sort of supplies might be useful? What sort of beasts might be encountered? Is there a map? Are there others who have crossed here whose guidance might be beneficial? Moreover, is it necessary or even desirable to venture into the unknown? A good many allowed themselves to be guided by faith and, holding to the older ways, hardly noticed that times were changing.

It was in Italy that the dawn first broke and men dressed for a new age. But must it be new? If overgrown and difficult to follow, there still were trails leading back, and everywhere those mighty ruins suggested a glorious past as opposed to the unfathomable

wilderness and towering mountains looming in the unknown future. Different men pursued differing directions (the Renaissance cannot be reduced to a particular philosophical movement) but the most direct path to the past seemed to be mapped by the writings left by the ancients themselves. Thus the Renaissance or ‘rebirth’ was in some sense an attempt to turn civilization around.

Although it is true that you can never go back, perhaps intuitively, they rummaged through the past for information about how to proceed. With great effort these ‘humanists’ salvaged what they could of the art and literature and especially the thought of the classical age, from both the Latin empire and the ancient Greeks, and in doing so took note of how the scholastics had reinterpreted that thought.

In searching through the distant past, they unearthed also poetry and literature and art that had not interested the philosophically oriented scholastics. They discovered the real Aristotle (or what was left of him) as opposed to the Thomist-Averroist versions that had been previously filtered through Augustine. They rediscovered Plato. They found the many conflicting philosophies of the Socratics and Post-Alexandrians in Greece, as well as the Latin versions: Lucretian Epicureanism; Aurelian Stoicism; and the various versions of skepticism, as well as the views of the early Church fathers, some of which had been nearly forgotten. They examined the old Romans, especially Cicero and Seneca. In their general veneration of the past, they not only lifted direct quotations for their own writing and rhetoric, but imitated the structure and style of the classics. As Florence had no central school—no established university—her thinkers, in imitation of Athens, established their own circles of explorers and followers, many of them supported by aristocratic patrons who coveted knowledge. Some of these went to Padua or Bologna to study law or medicine; some to Paris to study theology at the established schools. In this, and in many other ways, particularly by the spreading of their books and thoughts and especially in thoroughly composed scholarly letters, this ‘humanism’ spread.

It was certainly not the only manner of education. Humanists were interested mainly in the moral side of ancient philosophy and in the style and ways of the great lost civilizations. Through their research they enriched the discipline of history. The medieval curricula continued at the universities (law, medicine, theology, mathematics, astronomy—as well as astrology and alchemy, and also the visual arts and music, all of which were gradually influenced by humanism. It was not really a philosophy itself, nor did it spawn any particular philosophy. In fact, no unique Renaissance philosophy emerged, and there were few (if any) attempts to construct anything like a philosophical system before Rene Descartes. The period did tend to strongly encourage individualism, resulting in a growing polyphony of ideas to match their developing vocal music and the turbulent balance-of-power politics of the Italian city states. In this latter respect, the similarity with the world they were hoping somehow to reanimate could hardly go unnoticed.

Arnold Toynbee relates how Italy is to Western Civilization as Greece was to the Roman (or Hellenic) culture. He refers to Venice as the ‘Italian Athens,’ whereby he quotes Robert Browning’s lines from *A Toccata of Galuppi’s*:

Here you come with your old music, and here’s all the good it brings.  
 What, they lived once thus at Venice, where the merchants were the kings,  
 Where Saint Mark’s is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?  
 What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,  
 Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions—‘Must we die?’

Those commiserating sevenths—‘Life might last! We can but try!’  
 Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:  
 ‘Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned!’  
 ‘The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be discerned.’

[A STUDY OF HISTORY, ch.23, *Athens and Venice: The Idolization of an Ephemeral Self*]

And so Hellenism, it seemed, having been in suspended animation for a thousand years, might be resurrected. Many seriously thought the ancient Roman Republic could be re-established, out of which the world empire might again be realized. A brash attempt, in fact, was made, by a brazen intellectual, **Cola di Rienzo**. In one of the most bizarre events of history, he managed to gather a considerable following, ‘re-formed’ the Roman Republic, and was named Tribune [1347]. Though expert in oratory, he was no military specialist or statesman, and was eventually overthrown by fearful nobles (to the great relief also of the papacy), but not so easily as might have been expected, and he was exiled. He actually returned, and in triumph, to reclaim his position [1354]. Quickly overrun by superior forces, he was killed attempting to escape disguised as a servant.

If John A. Garraty and Peter Gay are correct in *THE COLUMBIA HISTORY OF THE WORLD*, the humanists named not only their own period the ‘Renaissance,’ but are responsible for naming the ‘Medieval’ period as well. They clearly saw themselves as the fulfillment of a long transition through the ‘dark ages,’ from the loss of the ancient world to its recovery. Thus a ‘rebirth’ in the sense of reviving both ancient pagan philosophy (Aristotle, Plato, Zeno, Cicero, Epicurus/Lucretius, *et al*) and art, *and* early Christian thought (Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Origen, etc.) but melded into a new understanding—the ‘how’ of which they were delightedly exploring. Scholasticism was still what was taught in the universities, so it competed with and helped shape the Renaissance for many years before fading away. As we see it from our 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, it was the *Renaissance* that was the transitory period, taking Western culture from the completion of what they pejoratively called the Medieval (the culmination of scholasticism, which took a while to die) to the period of modern science (which we will hereon refer to as the age of classical physics), which most seem to agree got its start with Galileo, though the Renaissance mode of life continued for another hundred years while the age of science developed in its adolescence toward Newton).

In this it was not unlike our own age, where it is difficult for many to realize that we are also in a transitory age. That is because, although we can see behind us the age of classical physics and its culmination in Einstein and quantum theory at the turn into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we cannot see the end of what has come to be called the ‘post modern’ period; or what may someday be known as the ‘digital age,’ or maybe the ‘age of consumption,’ or the ‘Re-evaluation,’ or perhaps the ‘Gross Contamination’ [*see* M.Somers; *GALACTIC EXODUS: Counterdance of the Cybergods*; Trafford; Canada/UK; 2008]. Historians of the future (though they will never find total agreement) must be left to judge the present from perhaps the vantage point of the 22<sup>nd</sup> century and beyond.

So, if the Renaissance was more than a look back, what propelled it forward? We are well aware of the newfound power of ideas as spread through the printing press and we have begun to discuss the rumblings in astronomy with the suggestions of Copernicus. Next we will encounter Galileo’s telescope, his study of the pendulum, his experiments with rolling balls down inclined planes, etc., all of which promoted the 16<sup>th</sup> century love affair with the scientific method. We cannot gather such a list without noting the progress

in art, literature (especially poetry), and music. Still, perhaps the two most far reaching events were the Protestant Reformation and the publishing of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. We'll try to get to the heart of what Protestantism meant for Western culture first, and then expose the lesser known but perhaps even more significant turning point: the birth of modern political philosophy with Machiavelli.

### **The Protestant Reformation:**

The rumblings of heresy became seriously alarming with an English anti-papist intellectual,

**John Wycliffe** [c.1328-1384]

who was expelled from Oxford after attacking the doctrine of transubstantiation), and on the Continent the Church was visibly threatened by a Bohemian



**Jan Hus** [c.1370-1415]

who was then condemned by the Council of Constance [1414], after which he was tried, convicted, and burned at the stake. His followers (called Hussites) actually engaged in war with the Church, and eventually the Hussite leader, George of Podebrad, was crowned King of Bohemia [1458]. But the Church could neither suppress heresy by violence nor reform itself to reclaim respect. There was just too much wealth involved and practically incurable corruption throughout, thus, heavy resistance to purification.

Early Renaissance popes sought to transform Rome after Gregory XI returned to the ruined city to end the 'Babylonian Captivity' [1309-1377]. To do so they needed to raise substantial sums. But the very next year Gregory died, setting the stage for the Great Schism [1378-1417], staining Catholicism even deeper. Even more money was needed as a new crusade was preached against the Turks who took Constantinople [1453], killed Emperor Constantine XI to close out the Eastern version of the Roman Empire, and turned St. Sophia into a mosque. The Crusade was cancelled due to lack of interest and much of the money gathered to launch it was spent on luxury for the pope and his retinue (which also gave us some of the greatest works of art in human history). To further darken the stain, Ferdinand and Isabella expanded the Inquisition to Spain, particularly to ferret out converted Jews still secretly practicing Judaism and now considered heretics. (Jews who had not converted were not considered heretics, so they were not condemned. Instead they were simply driven out of a Spain reserved for Catholics).

It was at this time that Columbus made his first voyage to (not yet) America [1492]. Only a year later Pope Alexander VI published the papal bull '*Inter cetera divina*,' audaciously dividing the new world between Spain and Portugal, ostensibly to prevent them from resorting to war—thus was the Age of Discovery so soon corrupted. The following year Charles VIII of France invaded Italy and the pope had to take refuge in the Castel Sant'Angelo. And it did not redound to the Church's favor that God seemed to have sent several rounds of miscellaneous plague, which reduced the population of Europe by somewhere near 40 percent.

### A New Political Science (embryonic): The Machiavellian Revolution



As with most of the innovation that had its origin in the Renaissance, the ‘new’ ideas about politics of Machiavelli, famous (or ‘infamous’) Florentine statesman were sparked by his

#### Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli [1469-1527]

thorough study of the ancients of both Greece and Rome, but most importantly of the Roman Republic. In following the greatest Greek philosophers, the ancient Roman moralists (e.g., Cicero, Seneca, etc.) took *virtú* to include the qualities of wisdom, justice, courage, and temperance. It was agreed that a leader must seek honor and glory, certainly, but that to gain it truly he must act with honesty (be a man of his word), magnanimity (understanding weaknesses of common men), and liberality (toleration). Cicero had taken Plato’s Republic dead seriously, repeating that it is only by moral methods that we can hope to achieve our goals,

true happiness, the ‘good.’ “Appearances to the contrary,” says Quentin Skinner [MACHIAVELLI: A Very Short Introduction; Oxford, 2000], paraphrasing Cicero from *De Officiis*, “are wholly deceptive, for expediency can never conflict with moral rectitude.” To state this another way: as a man ought not act immorally—even to save his life—but should die virtuously with his honor intact (witness Socrates in Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*)—a prince ought not act immorally, even when it seems necessary to save himself and his kingdom. Of course, men seldom act in this way. Only saints and martyrs and courageous heroes allow themselves to be tortured and killed when there is an alternative, however immoral. Princes are men, and so are no different.

This ancient concept that true happiness and real satisfaction can only be earned honestly and ethically had been assumed through the Medieval Period. Christianity, in fact, had bolstered that view by the attachment of non-virtuous behavior to sin in the eyes of God. The added virtues of Christianity: faith, hope, and especially charity, from which proceeded the idea of non-retaliation against enemies and the brotherhood of man, were harmful, according to Machiavelli, seriously corrupting and weakening Christian manhood and thus negatively affecting Western society. God actually demanded such selfless activity and proposed to reward the actor after death for the pains suffered in adhering to His code. So the expectation of salvation of one’s soul came only with living virtuously (or perhaps such behavior was affected more by the fear of damnation).

Machiavelli, having lost his prestigious civil service job (due to shifting family loyalties under a new Florentine administration) and apparently unrecognized for his talent by the new regime of Lorenzo the Magnificent, decided to write a book—actually two. Probably the first book he began, if only in his mind, was that dedicated to close friends: his *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*. While planning that book, it may have dawned on him that his political ideas were not only radical, but universally true, and ought to be brought to the attention of Lorenzo. But the language of *Discorsi* was not suitable for a prince. As Leo Strauss points out in his published version of his ‘Walgreen Lectures’ [given at the University of Chicago, 1953; THOUGHTS ON

MACHIAVELLI], certain things cannot be said directly to princes, and some things should not even be said in the presence of a prince. So Niccolo congested his thoughts, adjusted his language, and dedicated a smaller book of advice on kingship to Lorenzo: *The Prince*. He was not the first to write such a book for princes. This was not unusual at the time in question, nor was it considered bad form. Machiavelli felt particularly knowledgeable in this regard, having spent most of his useful life in diplomatic service to the City of Florence and having personally witnessed and admired Cesare Borgia's meteoric rise and decline—besides he needed work, so he had the book delivered to Lorenzo di' Medici, the current ruler of Florence. We do not know what Lorenzo thought of it, nor even if he read it.

Of the many writers before Machiavelli who wrote tracts on how to rule, there seemed a consensus that the ends of the prince (like the ends of any man) were honor and glory, and all of them agreed these could not be attained by acting dishonorably and viciously. Virtue was generally as prescribed by the ancient philosophers: honesty, justice, obedience to law and rulers, worshipping the gods, courage in battle, etc. I.e., humans (especially leaders) were to live in quest (at least) of personal perfection, even if that is unattainable for any but Christ. We still hope and strive for that.

Machiavelli was the first to publish opposition to that idea (at least to recommend such opposition) under his own name; thus advocating the lowering of expectations of humans. He actually argued that appearances, at least for the prince, were more important than truth; that there are times without number where the benefit of the realm might be served better by what the ancients would have considered non-virtuous behavior or even vicious acts. To be effective he must gain the respect of his subjects. He does that by encouraging admiration and love through the appearance of justice with magnanimity (and through propaganda), but he gains their utmost respect by inciting fear through his severity in public punishment, including executions. The appearance of honor and justice is helpful, but what was really 'good' was the courage and the strength and the willingness to do anything necessary to protect himself and magnify his power, and thereby stabilize and advance the state. Religion, regardless of truth or superstition, for a prince, becomes merely a useful tool for social stability. Saving souls is not his business. He deals in the physical and political world, and must care for the whole regime rather than for any individual—except himself, of course; for what he does to increase his personal power and his prestige he also does for the realm. Should situations arise (as they are bound to) whereby such virtues as justice, honesty, or mercy might weaken his stature or loosen his hold on power or lose a battle, such virtues are then no longer beneficial for the ruler and actually become defects or vices. For the good of all he must act decisively and without pity and think of nothing but his own continuance and the overall well being of his realm.

That was the true duty of the prince. Thus *virtú* was redefined. This has been seen as the downgrading of virtue (thus devaluing the human condition). But in Machiavelli's view this was arguably a *higher* virtue in a prince. The prince was, after all, risking his immortal soul by defying God's commandments while acting in a manner that would benefit or even save his kingdom and his subjects. This might require doing unspeakable evil, the necessity of which can only be judged by the doer: the Prince himself.

Thus Leo Strauss introduces his book about Machiavelli's philosophy by saying:

We shall not shock anyone, we shall merely expose ourselves to good-natured or at any rate harmless ridicule, if we profess ourselves inclined to the old fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil. Indeed, what other description would fit a man who teaches lessons like these: princes ought to exterminate the families of rulers whose territory they wish to possess securely; princes ought to murder their opponents rather than to confiscate their property since those who have been robbed, but not those who are dead, can think of revenge; men forget the murder of their fathers sooner than the loss of their patrimony; true liberality consists in being stingy with one's own property and in being generous with what belongs to others; not virtue but the prudent use of virtue and vice leads to happiness; injuries ought all to be done together so that, being tasted less, they will hurt less, while benefits ought to be conferred little by little, so that they will be felt more strongly; a victorious general who fears that his prince might not reward him properly, may punish him for his anticipated ingratitude by raising the flag of rebellion; if one has to choose between inflicting severe injuries and inflicting light injuries, one ought to inflict severe injuries; one ought not to say to someone whom one wants to kill "Give me your gun, I want to kill you with it," but merely, "Give me your gun," for once you have the gun in your hand, you can easily satisfy your desire. If it is true that only an evil man will stoop to teach such maxims of public and private gangsterism, we are forced to say that Machiavelli was an evil man.

Strauss admits this is not the generally accepted opinion among today's students of politics and history. We are more often told either that his is a patriotic philosophy, or that, as the forefather of political science, he is showing us the way to study social and political things scientifically. But Strauss explains that such descriptions are misleading.

While Machiavelli "is a patriot of a particular kind: he is more concerned with the salvation of his fatherland than with the salvation of his soul." This assumption places one's country above one's principles, as in 'my country, right or wrong.' "To justify Machiavelli's terrible counsels by having recourse to his patriotism," Strauss warns:

...means to see the virtues of that patriotism while being blind to that which is higher than patriotism, or to that which both hallows and limits patriotism. In referring to Machiavelli's patriotism one does not dispose of a mere semblance of evil; one merely obscures something truly evil.

It is no less misleading, Strauss insists, to speak of Machiavelli as a scientist or a student of science. In accord with the social empiricist creed, he points out:

The scientific student of society is unwilling or unable to pass "value-judgments," but Machiavelli's works abound with "value-judgments." His study of society is normative.

[Above quotes from LEO STRAUSS, *found in his* THOUGHTS ON MACHIAVELLI (*Introduction*); Univ. of Washington Press, Seattle, 1969]

If his study is unscientific, how does Machiavelli merit 'forefather of political science'? He is also considered a forefather of political liberalism. Quentin Skinner [MACHIAVELLI: *A Very Short Introduction*] calls him "The Theorist of Liberty." Yet *The Prince* seems to recommend tyranny. How are these problems resolved—or are they?

By ‘political science’ (prior to the development of modern science) we mean merely a study of how things seem to develop; a study made so certain desired development might be repeated. The assumption is, by finding the principles and laws by which Rome achieved her glory, and by instituting those principles and laws we will get a similar result. While the word ‘tyranny’ is not used in *The Prince*, there is little doubt about the outcome of a ruler following Machiavelli’s advice as found therein. But in his other book about political philosophy, *Discourses*, he clearly claims to hold republics above monarchies and claims to have discovered why it is that republics are able to rise to greatness and world domination, while monarchies seldom are successful in governing people beyond their borders.

Republics respect the common good, whereas monarchies, with their tendency toward tyranny, respect only the good of the ruler. The laws made by the republic tend to be good for the whole, whereas laws made by the single ruler may be good only for him and harmful to the state. This seems to contradict what he said in *The Prince* about the ruler’s personal good being identical with the good of the state. It seems that it is the liberty attained through self-government that makes the city strong. But how can we attain, and perhaps more importantly, *maintain* this liberty? How can we prevent corrosion of the republic? Machiavelli admits that a great deal of luck is involved. Basing everything on his developing (or preconceived?) version of ancient Rome, he expects that only those fortunate states which are founded in freedom can remain free and be successful.

While later Romans could be considered lucky that their state was founded on liberty, Tyche or Fortuna is not to get all the credit, since fortune must be accompanied by *virtú* if a city is to be successful. Machiavelli reminds us that Fortuna is a woman and can be manipulated by the right sort of man. He contends that she favors those who scorn her: the harder men; the risk-takers; those who push their luck—though of course she also takes the greatest pleasure in ultimately crushing them when they soften, or when she tires of tending to their pleasure and abandons them for another, younger and harder. In short, she likes the kind of men who share the author’s new definition of *virtú*.

The citizens, too, in a republic, must understand what Machiavelli told the prince about political virtue: that they must be ruthless concerning the continuity of their communal well-being and that of their city and their liberty. But Cicero—as quoted by Machiavelli—said “there are some acts either so repulsive or so wicked that a wise man would not commit them even to save his country” [Cicero: *de Officiis*, I.45.159]. Cicero points to the very founding of Rome, where Romulus killed his brother, Remus, because he saw that one ruler, rather than two, would be better for the ultimate fate of Rome—i.e., it was politically expedient. This crime cannot be condoned, Cicero contended, because it is in no way defensible—especially since the future cannot be divined. But Machiavelli replies that no ‘prudent intellect’ will ever ‘censure anyone for any unlawful action used in organizing a kingdom or setting up a republic.’ Since Rome’s future turned out well:

Though the deed accuses him, the result should excuse him; and when it is good, like that of Romulus, it will always excuse him, because he who is violent to destroy, not he who is violent to restore, ought to be censured.

[Machiavelli: *Discourses*; quoted by Quentin Skinner  
in his *MACHIAVELLI: A Short Introduction*; Oxford, 2000]

Given the above, it would seem that a virtuous people, seeing their government as tyrannical, have not only a right but a duty to revolt for the good of all. But how to distinguish a ‘destroying’ from a ‘restoring’ revolutionary—or one who would destroy a regime in order that it might be re-founded on right principles? Intentions of actors cannot be clearly discerned and results of action must wait, perhaps for years.

Not only that, viewpoints are relative. A woman who loses her family in the revolution might not think its ultimate success is worth the cost. Executions that *must* be ‘awarded’ to the losing side might be so brutal as to taint the victory and the subsequent life-process of the new regime, preventing it from *ever* becoming worth the cost. “Florence’s one remaining chance to secure her liberties,” says Skinner, “came in 1494”:

...when the Medici [Cosimo and his followers] were again forced into exile and the republic was fully restored. At this point, however, the city’s new leaders, under the direction of Piero Soderini, made the most fatal mistake of all by failing to adopt a policy which, Machiavelli has argued, is absolutely indispensable whenever such a change of regime takes place. Anyone who has read ancient history “knows that once a move has been made from tyranny into republic,” it is essential for the sons of Brutus to be killed (*Discourses*, 424-5). But Soderini “believed that with patience and goodness he could overcome the longing of Brutus’ sons to get back under another government,” since he believed that “he could extinguish evil factions” without bloodshed and “dispose of some men’s hostility” with rewards (425). The outcome of this shocking naïveté was that the sons of Brutus—that is, the partisans of the Medici—survived to destroy him and restore the Medicean tyranny.

[MACHIAVELLI: *A Short Introduction*; Quentin Skinner; pp.81-2]

Stalin and Mao and Fidel Castro and the parade of tin-pot dictators of Africa and South America either had read their history on this point—or it was so obviously true in a modern world spawned under Machiavelli’s influence, that they didn’t need to. Furthermore, it is the winners who write history. It was clear to the founders of the U.S.A., for instance, that had they lost their War of Independence they would be traitors to the Crown and executed as vile perpetrators of injustice and unlawfulness. Recall that when signing the Declaration of Independence Franklin quipped “Gentlemen, now we must all hang together, or we shall certainly hang separately”. By following Franklin’s advice, victory gave them immortality as heroes. And how are we to see such as the Bolsheviks, or Maoists, or NAZIs, or even, much their junior, Fidel Castro? Shall they be forgiven their atrocities, presuming they intended the good of the whole state in the combined ‘liquidation’ of near 100,000,000 of their own countrymen?

These and many other conundrums are not resolved by Machiavelli, but he deeply affected the future by stating so gracefully, logically, and forcefully his presumption that men were by nature selfish, corrupt, and unmendable rather than pure and fallen and salvageable, and by essentially detaching politics from morality and ethics and religion to present it as a purely secular activity, subject to separate investigation, thus suggesting that its laws might be deduced from experience: i.e., political science.

This opened a door to the powerful vision of Hobbes that the original state of humanity was more like hell than Eden, leading to the notion that government is not natural but invented. That meant that man was not a ‘political animal’ (as had been long assumed in accordance with Aristotle) but merely a beast with a brain; a beast that came

to understand it had to struggle against a merciless nature ‘red in tooth and claw’; that these rather special beasts could and must contract with each other to mutual advantage in that struggle if they were to live—or at least live well; and that science and mathematics might be just the weapons needed for ultimate victory.



**Thomas Hobbes [1588-1679]**

According to this view human cultures—cities, civilizations—rise from the refining of the social contract. Justice and rights, even the virtues, are not natural to pre-humans and are not something to be discovered (or revealed in scripture, or granted by gods). They are artificial, thus, invented. So they are products: products of a sort of social science through which political stability is attained and maintained. What *does* exist by nature (forming the basis of the not yet extant political ‘left’) is *freedom* (freedom implied by the making of such a contract in the first place) and *equality* (equality of individuality unbound by law, since law is a product of the contract). Precious chunks of that natural freedom and equality are bargained away by granting sovereignty in exchange for security—until, at last (ideally, from the perspective of the extreme ‘right’) perfect security is achieved under absolute (but, of course, beneficent) despotism.

And yet, in another sense, certain sorts of freedom and equality are indeed gained or improved thereby: freedom from want, freedom from fear of attacks of wild beasts and the dangers of uncaring nature; equality in citizenship and in whatever rights have been granted by the initial agreement (presuming any are left)—not to mention the life-improving mental development that proceeds (sometimes) out of this reduction of chaos and the benefits derived from such as the organization and division of labor and civic responsibilities—all of this promoted by the social contract.

We can look back into ancient history ourselves and find almost all of what Machiavelli pronounced. It is not, then, all that original. But it was always previously associated with bad men or looked upon as wrong. These were ideas that were to be overcome, not accepted. So what took so long? Why did this outpouring wait until the 15<sup>th</sup> century? According to Mark Lilla at Columbia Univ., this had to do with the special culture and attitude that grew out of Christianity. Christian cosmology, he explains:

...was always a patchwork affair...cobbled together in the Middle Ages from biblical sources, the speculations found in Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus*, the systematic scientific treatises of Aristotle (filtered through Muslim commentators), and the ancient astronomical works of Ptolemy.

[THE STILLBORN GOD: *Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*; by Mark Lilla; Vintage, Random House, NY, 2008; p.59]

Lilla himself wonders why it happened. It did not seem necessary, he points out, since the bible made no connection between how the world was created and in what way men ought to behave. It assumes the creation was good (because God thought so), but there were no ethical rules derived thereby. The *Torah* was complete in that regard. But that, it could be argued, is the work of man the thinker.

For the old philosophers, cosmology and ethics were linked in their idea of nature, emphasized by Aristotle's description of man as the 'political animal'—meaning society and the behavior necessary to live socially was natural—whereas in *Genesis* it is due to Adam & Eve's fall from grace. In fact, biblically, it seems, man is not at all natural—or became so only by mistake; by his sin. Nature itself, as we know it, seems to have been instigated by the Fall when, by relying on reason instead of mindless obedience (discovery of the mind), man lost dominance over the living world and life became competitive, devolving into the predator/prey, eat-or-be-eaten relationship.

Early Greek speculation on natural cosmic beginnings survived by becoming attached to Christianity during the Roman decline. Then, further enmeshed with theology during the era of scholasticism, that pagan philosophy could not be removed. Through the attempted synthesis of reason and revelation, particularly by Aquinas (but by no means all by himself), the church had begun to see natural theology and political theology as mutually supporting, expecting that the whole world could, in principle, be explained by, and found to support, Christian ethics; that we could (paradoxically, in the very culmination of the dissident spirit of Adam and Eve) reason our way to God's intent. The failure of that idea, plus the combined forces of cynicism, church corruption, the multi-heresies, the Inquisition, the selling of heaven, the Protestant Reformation, the plague, the Renaissance tendency to reflect on the past, along with the birth of the new idea of science out of natural philosophy (the laws of motion, the telescope, the solar system, the infinite universe, etc.), brought about a situation unprecedented in history, and (unbeknownst to most Europeans) political theology thus came to an end in Europe. The whole idea of religion—any religion—as the basis of politics (i.e., revelation itself) was called into question, and thus occurred what Lilla calls the 'Great Separation.' From this point a strictly natural political theory emerged that would become increasingly disconnected from theology, and would thus have to seek its grounding ethics in nature—via science. This, says Lilla, "remains the most distinctive feature of the modern West to this day"

[Lilla; *Stillborn God*, p.58]

**Michel de Montaigne** [1533-1592] revealed early in his *Essays* the understanding of the danger to the human psyche presented by reason without religion. Can anyone actually believe that "this admirable movement of the celestial arch, the eternal light of those planets and stars that roll so proudly over his head, the fearful motions of that infinite ocean, were established, and continue so many ages, for his service and convenience? Can anything be imagined so ridiculous as that this miserable and wretched creature, who is not so much as master of himself...should call himself master and emperor of the world?"

If, as Montaigne thinks he should, man "feels and sees himself lodged here in the dirt and filth of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst and deadest part of the universe, in the lowest story of the house, and most remote from the heavenly arch," how absurd for him to imagine himself "above the circle of the moon and bringing heaven under his feet." Except by the vanity of the same imagination" by which "he equals himself to God," how can he regard himself as occupying an exalted position in the universe?

[*Quotes from Montaigne's Essays*;  
per GBWW; Syntopicon II; ch.102, *World*; p.1118]

ASSIGNMENT: **Make a list** of all the things you can think of and find (good and bad) that were invented, discovered, or radically changed during the Renaissance, (+/-) 1400-1600.

**Turn in this list at the next class session.**

Right and wrong answers are not the issue. The effort displayed by the compiling of your list will be judged rather than its actual content – lists to be discussed & related to topic: the 'paradigm shift' (per Thomas Kuhn [STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS]).

HANDOUT: for supplemental reading, from MACHIAVELLI: *A Short Introduction*; Quentin Skinner; Oxford, 1981-- p.60+--esp. p.63, par.2-3 -- & p.80 'keeping treasuries rich & citizens poor'