

# *Was Maritain a Crypto-Machiavellian?*

James V. Schall, S.J.

For the fear of soiling ourselves by entering the context of history is not virtue, but a way of escaping virtue.

—Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (1949)<sup>1</sup>

The admonition that a Christian political leader should never do evil causes problems.... Although Maritain issued stricture against resorting to evil means in politics, he, nevertheless, proposed that politicians may have to choose the lesser of two evils.

—M. Susan Power, "Evil and the Political," (1992)<sup>2</sup>

## I

The two brief passages that I have chosen to cite in the beginning are provocatively designed to make us wonder if there is not something to worry about in Maritain, even as he worried about Machiavelli? Can we not turn the brief passage from *Man and the State* somewhat around to suggest that Maritain seems to be advocating the "soiling" of our hands in history. Isn't this advice just a euphemism for doing something rotten that would stain us? He connected virtue with this hand-soiling and seems to caution us against those who would too much shun evil. Put this way, he sounds uncomfortably like the great Florentine himself who implied the same thing in a less cryptic way than Maritain.

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>M. Susan Power, "Evil and the Political," *Jacques Maritain: Christian Democrat, and the Quest for a New Commonwealth* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), p. 110.

Susan Power, in her excellent discussion of Maritain on evil, points to a similar problem. Though at first sight Maritain thinks that we “should never do evil,” still this sound principle leads him into some pretty dubious paths to justify things that most people would, at first sight, call evil. Maritain himself is critical of the purists in politics who are spotless in deed, but only because they did nothing while things fell into chaos. Maritain apparently turns out to be as cagy as Machiavelli. This “choosing of the lesser of evils” seems to permit us to choose evil in some way, just like Machiavelli did. Machiavelli himself, given a choice, never would have advocated choosing the greater evil for its own sake. He saw that cruelty as such could have counter-productive aspects. Thus, to play the devil’s advocate in the beginning, the end of Maritainism seems to coincide cozily with the end of Machiavellianism.

From somewhere, I acquired a book entitled, *The Public Speaker’s Treasure Chest*, published by Harper & Brothers in 1942. The book contains four thousand and fifty-three not always helpful Entries. The very last Entry, #4053, is a now politically incorrect sentence from Goethe, that reads, “Girls we love for what they are; young men for what they promise to be.” I must confess seeing some truth in it. Entry #737 provides a four-line poem that appears to have been designed to brighten up sermons at baccalaureate services for modest clerical academics:

A divinity student named Tweedle  
 Refused to accept his degree;  
 He didn’t object to the “Tweedle,”  
 But hated the “Tweedle, D.D.”

Most bishops, to recall, have the formal title of, say, “The Most Reverend Thomas Jones, D.D.”

With some considerable stretch of the imagination in the illogic of my mind, this D.D. academic-title custom for higher clergy calls to mind the famous Chapter XI of *The Prince*, “On Ecclesiastical Politics,” in which we find the wickedly amusing sentence: “Then Alexander VI rose up, who, of all pontiffs that have ever been, showed how much a pope with money and with forces could prevail.” Here at last was one pope with many divisions. Thus, not without some irony, we can approach our topic by recalling how the first of the modern political philosophers praised the worst of the popes and, further, how, ever since, good philosophers like Jacques Maritain tried to uncouple this unholy alliance.

One chapter of the said *Treasure Chest* is designated, “Colorful Phrases for Sparkling Speech.” Needless to say, I perked right up at this section, when I realized that Entry #2512 is directed to our present purpose. It reads:

“*Machiavellian*—Political cunning or bad faith; unscrupulous. Machiavelli was a Florentine statesman (1469-1527) who believed that any means, however unscrupulous, may be properly employed by a ruler in order to maintain a strong central government.” It seems odd, no doubt, that such a sober passage is listed as “colorful,” something that might add zest to our “sparkling speech.”

Further, it almost seems prophetic that what Machiavelli was seeking to enhance was understood in this text to be, not a Prince’s power, but “a strong central government.” By these terms, if the form of rule is democratic, it might well, without change of definition, properly employ certain means “however unscrupulous.” This apparently innocent identification of any “strong central government” with Machiavelli’s doctrine also recalls learned academic discussions about whether a different doctrine can be found in *The Prince* and in *The Discourses*, because one deals with a monarchy and the other with a republic. Leo Strauss, for one, in his *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, maintained that the doctrine is the same in both books; that is, it is possible to have a tyrannical republic—a topic, as John Paul II frequently points out, of the utmost currency.

Let me affirm immediately that, in spite of my title, I do not think Jacques Maritain was a “crypto-Machiavellian”; that is, he was not someone who denied the validity of Machiavellian principles at one level only to let them in unrecognized at another. Yet, at first sight, it sometimes seems that he tried to protect himself from the charge of political naïveté by a realism with which Machiavelli might well content himself. Maritain’s long and intricate praise of Gandhi’s spiritual method of non-resistance in *Freedom in the Modern World*, for example, seems rather unconvincing in the light of Maritain’s acid remark in *Man and the State* that “Gandhi’s successes were possible only against the relative freedom granted to the colonials by the British administration . . .”<sup>3</sup> Maritain did not think that such peaceful tactics would work so well against the more brutal totalitarian states, at least in the short-run. The political success of Gandhism presupposed the prior existence of Christianity—a theme that will run through all Maritain’s works.

Other means, even coercion, rough police methods, using corrupted informers, war, and such distinctly unpleasant things, Maritain pointed out, will have to be used if states in the real world are to survive, if good men are not to be blamed for doing nothing.<sup>4</sup> In suggesting such things, Maritain was careful to retain the thread of morality. Even the much discussed and controverted use of the principles of the lesser evil or the double effect attests to this effort to act ethically, as Susan Power rightly indicates. Thus, for some, Maritain’s state in

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 68.

practice does not look that much different from Machiavelli's. Yet, Maritain was quite sure that he and Machiavelli were in different camps, if not in different moral worlds. Maritain wanted to answer the claims of Machiavelli in terms and methods that are not themselves Machiavellian. Did he?

## II

When students first encounter Machiavelli, I have often noticed, many will breathe a sigh of relief.<sup>5</sup> Term papers become fulsome in their praise of the novelty and coherence of Machiavelli's positions. Any half-awake student can discover in any library literally hundreds of books and studies that will help him clarify and justify the genius of the great Florentine diplomat. Students feel that at last here we have discovered someone who understands "real" politics. They are delighted and charmed, as they were intended to be, by Machiavelli's pungent barbs skillfully aimed against the claims of morality, classical and Christian.

Already at a young, prematurely cynical age, already conditioned by the culture of death, students think that Machiavelli has described how men "do" act, a precious bit of knowledge that they know they will find useful. They too are awed by the teachings of how to rule contained in the ruthless accounts of Ramirro d'Orco and Liverotto da Fermo. They are delighted that someone has reduced this lived experience to intellectual order and literary elegance. When, in turn, it is recalled to them, however, in texts they have just read, that nothing in Machiavelli's description of what goes on in political life is not already found in Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, or Aquinas, they are confused and perplexed that they did not notice the resemblances. Their souls really were moved when they read that Socrates thought it better to die than to do any evil. Now they are moved in exactly in the opposite direction. This should be cause to make them worry about their souls.

Nevertheless, the students cannot be fooled. They know that there is something quite different about Machiavelli. They thought, wrongly, that it was because he described something that no one previously had detailed. When they realize that what is different about Machiavelli is not what they thought it was, they are even more puzzled. At this point, as himself a devoted reader of Machiavelli, the teacher asks the students to indicate just what was the precise difference between the classics and Machiavelli? They are to recall that Machiavelli himself considered this difference in a famous, withering passage

<sup>5</sup>See James V. Schall, "The 'Realism of Augustine's 'Political Realism': Augustine and Machiavelli," *Perspectives in Political Science*, 25 (Summer, 1956), pp. 117-23.

about the utter political defeat richly deserved by anyone rash enough to act as the practitioners of 'what we "ought" to do' advocate. Those classical conjurers of non-existing kingdoms, he remarked, had nothing to teach the actual Prince.

To move the discussion along, however, the blunt remark of Leo Strauss is read to them, namely, that Machiavelli is a "teacher of evil." In spite of the spell Machiavelli has cast over them, the students still recognize that this charge from an important source is serious. What might this description, "teacher of evil," mean? It means first, that other writers existed who could not be so described as "teachers of evil"—Plato and Aristotle, the very ones from whom Machiavelli wanted to be disassociated. Those who did not teach evil and those that did teach it seemed to belong to differing worlds, ancient and modern, as some call them. The word virtue as it appears in Aristotle and as it appears in Machiavelli, furthermore, are quite different terms. Augustine, perhaps the nearest parallel to Machiavellian political realism in philosophic history, was, it is next recalled, also a "teacher of evil," or better, a teacher of what evil was. Augustine calls to mind the Platonic and scholastic idea that the knowledge of evil was not evil. Even though it is not a thing, we are supposed to know "what" evil is, to know what we can about it or how to avoid it.

Augustine concluded that evil was the lack of a good in something in which the good ought to exist—a remarkably brief and accurate statement. Augustine taught about evil, but he did not advocate it; though he sometimes did, in his infamous early days, practice it. At this juncture, the students will finally understand that, at the level of teaching at least, the difference between Augustine and Machiavelli was that one defined evil; the other, acknowledging that evil was evil, proposed a context in which it could, with clear conscience, be used to political purpose. Evil was politically, if not intellectually, legitimized, either because our lot was tragic and we could not escape it, or because politics had its own independent norms of right and wrong that could contradict those of personal morality.

### III

The contribution of Jacques Maritain to the ongoing reflections on Machiavelli is a noteworthy one, even though Maritain's specific remarks on Machiavelli consisted in one medium-sized essay, "The End of Machiavellianism," and several other incisive paragraphs in other works, notably *Man and the State*. However, Maritain was a thorough "teacher about evil," in that he returned to this classical philosophical and theological problem in several books and many essays, notably, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, *The Sin of the Angel*, *Dieu et la permission du mal*, and *Approches sans entraves*. My own

interest in Maritain on this score, on the relation of his presumably later teaching on evil and his teaching on Machiavelli, came from the work of E. B. F. Midgley. The point at issue concerns Maritain's musings about Limbo and the saving of all sinners and all fallen angels, including Lucifer.<sup>6</sup>

In *Approches sans entraves*, Maritain recalled his earlier speculations about this problem as an aspect of the general teaching on evil. If I read him correctly, Maritain was not exactly writing in a "wouldn't it be nice if" mode, but, rather, was engaging in a kind of speculation about this matter just to see where it might go. He was likewise attempting not to be heretical. He did not manage, in the end, to get Judas and Lucifer and any other top candidate for damnation to the Beatific Vision. Maritain did, however, in his intellectual speculations on the topic, get them to Limbo, to a place we have not heard mentioned for some time, though the intellectual problem it was designed to address, the fate of unbaptized infants, still needs properly to be addressed in any theological treatise. Though Purgatory is discussed in an orderly fashion in the new *General Catechism*, Limbo does not merit even a footnote.

Limbo, as I just mentioned, was originally proposed as a solution for the problem of unbaptized infants—a problem that has some current relevance because of the marketing of the French abortion pill along with the Holy Father's repeated and repeated affirmation that human life begins at conception. The fate of hell, however, seemed unjust and the necessity of some sort of baptism seemed to be required by Christ's terms. Today most would follow the remark in Vatican II that says that God will not deny His graces to those who could not otherwise know Him. Just how this position is to be carried out in the light of the need of baptism is not fully resolved. What is important is to keep any possibility of final damnation directly related to free will. Maritain wanted to propose that, after the final Judgment, God could use his arbitrary power to relocate poor Lucifer at last in a less heinous place than his original consignment

<sup>6</sup>Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans entraves, Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1992), Vol. 12, pp. 454-77. Most of Midgley's remarks are in manuscript form for his forthcoming analysis of political philosophy, but see his remarks on Maritain and Machiavelli in general in *The Natural Law Tradition and the Theory of International Relations* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), pp. 41-43; pp. 100-107. In Midgley's "Concerning the Modernist Subversion of Political Philosophy," *The New Scholasticism*, LIII (Spring, 1979), he notes that, "Maritain has observed, that in order to correct the errors of modernism, it is not only necessary to reject the Machiavellian 'realism' but also to reject entirely the false Machiavellian dichotomy between 'idealism' and 'realism.' Strauss fails to maintain the crucial position of Maritain" (p. 176). Midgley does see good things of Maritain. Perhaps the most critical remarks on Maritain in this area come from Hamish Fraser, *Jacques Maritain and Saul David Alinsky: Fathers of the 'Christian' Revolution*, in Supplement to *Approches* #71, Saltcoats, Scotland.

warranted. But Maritain still wanted to deny the Fallen Angel the whole package. His compassion, unlike that currently running rampant through intellectual and religious circles, was not able to excuse absolutely everything, including the deliberate unrepentant choices of free will.

Maritain was careful in this musing not to maintain that evil was good. Evil remained evil. He was concerned with the apparently necessary consequence of this position, namely, that God has to carry through on His word to judge and punish those who knowingly violate God's law. But this seems unpleasant, to say the least. Maritain wonders, isn't there some way at least to mitigate these consequences while keeping the principles that demanded them? The problem with his argument was whether the elimination of eternal punishment did not likewise render human choice insignificant? Had Lucifer at the first moment of his existence suspected that, in the end, he could get off with a lighter sentence, would he not have been less worried about any divine threats of punishment?

The question, and this is the reason I bring it up here, is whether Maritain's downgrading of the consequences of evil, despite his concern to keep within the limits of orthodoxy, implied some misunderstanding of the seriousness of his commitment both to natural and supernatural good? Did it not imply a lessening of the gravity of human choice? Give or take a few distinctions, if the worst we have to worry about is Limbo, why not take a chance? Midgley, and others, believe there is a problem here. This reflection on evil perhaps would remain a purely speculative exercise, if it were not for the fact that Maritain's political theory, which many consider to be the weakest part of his philosophy, did not reveal, in his discussion of the democratic charter and the acceptance of the terms of the modern democratic state, a kind of practical relativism that minimized the seriousness with which we are to live according to the truth and virtue.

The concern is that Maritain's political analysis, by being too lenient on revolutions, on aberrations, and on the political consequences of serious philosophical errors, did not tend to undercut spiritual means and grace as the primary way to a peaceful civil society. No one denies that Maritain constantly refers to the need for spiritual means and wants earnest attention to truth. But his politics seems able to get along fairly well without them. The issue joins up with the concerns of Machiavelli, whose willingness to use evil means to retain power likewise seems to be rooted in a lessening of the seriousness of evil in the world. While a Newman could say that the whole world was not worth a single venial sin, Machiavelli recalled Cesare Borgia's sending of Ramirro d'Orco after Cesna with the cold calculation of a man who has learned the secret of how to rule.

## IV

Is there anything in Maritain that would suggest a kind of Machiavellian outlook? Does his developed theory of evil suggest that we can be so tolerant of our intellectual and moral differences, especially in the political order, that these have become merely differing ways of doing things? What can be so bad about what we choose to tolerate? He himself recognized the preliminary status of what he speculated about. If, however, this mitigation of the seriousness of evil is where the evolution of his thought led him, if even the devil reaches Limbo, who are we to worry too much about the minor things we do? Even the worst of political disorders will have no particularly everlasting results. If Lucifer gets off at Limbo, surely most of us will make it within the Pearly Gates with our relatively paltry sins?

Maritain's famous essay on "The End of Machiavellianism" represented his formal attempt to reject the adoption of evil means as a normal instrument of political power.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, this essay was also Maritain's endeavor to instruct us on what we could practically do if in fact we could not morally respond to Machiavelli's Prince in kind. Was a moral republic, in other words, an unarmed republic? Maritain did not think so. Machiavelli in a famous phrase had said that all armed prophets succeeded and all unarmed prophets failed. This brought up the question of whether Machiavelli himself was an armed prophet. Of course, he was not. The other main unarmed Prophet was Christ. The unarmed prophets, as it turns out, would include Machiavelli himself and Maritain—that is, those who teach the princes how to rule. Maritain in a certain sense sought to become the unarmed prophet waging his war against the unarmed prophet, Machiavelli, all in order to instruct and tame the armed prophets of this world.

How was this war waged? Like all intellectual wars, it was waged with distinctions. "The great strength of Machiavellianism comes from the incessant victories gained by evil means in the political achievements of mankind," Maritain wrote, "and from the idea that if a prince or a nation respects justice, he or it is doomed to enslavement by other princes or nations trusting only in power, violence, perfidy, and lawless greed."<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Maritain did not want to associate himself with this position. Maritain's pithy answer to this observation makes us wonder what he has in mind. "The answer is . . . that one can respect justice and have brains, at the same time."<sup>9</sup> The Machiavellian brain must now

<sup>7</sup> See Raymond Aron, "French Thought in Exile: Jacques Maritain and the Quarrel over Machiavellianism," in *In Defence of Political Reason*, ed. Daniel J. Mahoney (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), pp. 49-68.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*, pp. 56-57.

stand against the Maritainian brain. The Prince must be aware that the philosopher is not totally unarmed. The justice with brains that responds to the evil with brains results in no unmessy or uncomplicated world. But Machiavellianism may win in the short term, Maritain admitted this.

Maritain was not going to deny that the causes that bring evil into the world have to be given their say, their opportunity. This is what freedom means. It is always a prior fact that is in the background of any discussion of evil. Even though God is the cause of being, including the being in which any evil might relate itself, free willed beings are the cause of that lack in being that ought to be there. In *Dieu et la permission du mal*, Maritain recalled certain basic principles always to keep in mind when considering this perplexing topic:

- 1) "La certitude fondamentale, le roc auquel nous devons nous cramponner dans cette question du mal moral, c'est l'innocence absolue de Dieu . . ."<sup>10</sup>
- 2) "Du mal comme tel Dieu n'est nullement cause même indirectement, c'est la créature que est la cause première du mal."<sup>11</sup>
- 3) "Le mal est connu de Dieu sans être nullement causé par lui."<sup>12</sup>

God is not the cause of evil; the rational creature is, but what God knows as evil, even moral evil, He does not cause. He cannot not know the disorder in being that he causes to stand outside of nothingness

The only sure way to deny evil an opportunity in the world is to deny that its cause should exist, that is, in context, to deny either God or freedom, a theme that Maritain developed in his treatment of modern atheism.<sup>13</sup> Evil's cause is always related to free will residing in a finite being. But if we eliminate finite being, we also eliminate evil. But we likewise in theory deny God the power of His creation, not to mention the power of his providence. Maritain thought that evil choices must be left to carry themselves out in reality. He was not afraid to let this happen because, in part, it seems to be what God does. It is only in the long run that Machiavellianism will certainly fail. Some writers find a sort of consequentialism in this view whereby we do not know something is evil until

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> "The fundamental certitude, the rock on which we ought to fasten ourselves in this question of moral evil is *the absolute innocence of God*." Jacques Maritain, *Dieu et la permission du mal* [1963], *Œuvres Complètes*, Vol. 12, 1992, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> "Of evil as such, God is in no wise the cause even indirectly, it is the creature who is the first cause of evil." *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> "God knows evil without being in any way the cause of it." *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Maritain, "The Meaning of Contemporary Atheism," in *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain* [1949], eds. Joseph Evans and Leo Ward (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), pp. 175-86.

we see the consequences. Maritain did not mean that evil is not seen as evil unless we see the consequences. He meant that evil consequences will inevitably appear from evil acts. But we cannot "see" them on a worldly plane until they bring about their effects. Even when things look good after doing a bad act, the disorder is working itself out in reality.

The real problem with Maritain's analysis of evil, of his effort to save even Lucifer, seems to be that it could reveal a lessening of the meaning of free will and the object to which it is directed, namely the good in things as seen in the truth about them. How might this work? It has something to do with the proposition that democracy is the best regime. Everyone knows that democracy is the best of the worst regimes in the classics. But the word democracy has come to mean that regime on the basis of which all nation-states should form themselves. The purpose of wars and international intervention is to "establish democracy" as a cure of civil disorder. Maritain rejected the medieval model for a modern model which avoids having anything specifically or directly Christian in the public order. Maritain did not exclude Christians from his body politic, nor anybody else for that matter. Nor did he think that democracy could survive by itself without Christian influence.

What he did do, and this seems to be Midgley's point, is to remove the question of truth from the specifically political world. This could mean that there should be a national and world order in which all faiths, religions, and philosophies are joined together, but with no consensus on why they should agree. This practical world order becomes a higher ideal than any sacral order that more clearly recognizes the relation of reason and revelation, thought and action. Maritain had hoped that natural law would serve to ground some sort of natural basis for this understanding of democracy. The fact is that natural law, which might in fact have served this purpose, has not, as yet at least, done so. Natural law itself is said to be something that depends for its validity on revelation, which, if true, means there is no natural law, or so it is claimed.

The best regime had national-state and world-wide dimensions. Maritain did not think he was being utopian but following the logical premises of Aristotle and St. Thomas on this score. He did not conceive the world organization so much after the model of the state, in his definition, but of the body politic. The mission to establish democracy as a kind of higher form of worldly truth was seen to absorb the methods of reason and faith that were traditionally in the Ecclesiastical and sacramental order as the way to improve indirectly the social order. Midgley wondered how so much radical and worldly utopianism got into specifically Catholic social thought in modern times. He suspected that Maritain had something to do with it. The culprit, again, was the theory of evil found in the whole of Maritain.

In his specific treatment of evil, Maritain had no difficulty in following the teaching of Augustine that evil was the lack of a good in some being to which it belonged by nature. Evil was a privation of a good, not a thing. Maritain was aware of the Manichean problem. But in his political philosophy, he had to find some way to mitigate in principle the wars of philosophies and religion without at the same time affirming that these wars had no basis in the speculative order. If it is only the Christians who are going to be tolerant, they will be absorbed quickly by other less tolerant systems, just as Machiavelli had predicted. This was why Maritain proposed the democratic charter that insisted on enforceable agreement on practical principles, the first of which would be this tolerance. Needless to say, this emphasis sounds rather like Mill, but Maritain was not a theoretical skeptic.

The question is, however, whether this emphasis on practical matters did not tend to elevate a kind of this worldly project as the main purpose of religion, rather than the avoidance of evil and the salvation of one's soul and the spiritual means needed to achieve it? This is, no doubt, a delicate and subtle point. Classical Christianity was pretty sure, as was Maritain following an oft-cited passage from Bergson, that democracy would need the influence of Christianity if it were to succeed, a position that changes the nature neither of reason nor democracy. The question was, how was this needed Christian influence to operate on the hypothesis that Maritain gave to us about the practical order? If there is, subsequently, a certain upgrading of the natural order of politics in overall importance due to the impasse of theoretical diversity and the invisible nature of any influence of grace even on believing citizens, did not this mean that the questions of salvation, of virtuous life, of right order were not so pressing?

The link between these kinds of tendencies and Maritain's final ruminations on evil and the ultimate reduction, as it were, of Lucifer's sentence, is this: if the worst of moral disorders turns out in the end to be not so dangerous, this will logically mean that the strict and severe admonitions that we have from revelation and reason about right living will equally be of less importance. If Lucifer can make it, why not Machiavelli himself, or Hitler? And if these three unhappy characters can make it at least to Limbo, assuming what must be assumed about it, then it looks like the causes of why someone would be in Hell in the first place—Maritain still described Limbo as "Hell" in the sense that it is not the "Beatific Vision"—could not be as serious as we had been led to believe.

## V

So was Maritain, in the end, a crypto-Machiavellian? In his 1991 Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II placed this sentence: "The Church persuades;

she imposes nothing.” Maritain certainly wrote in that spirit. This statement cannot be taken to mean, however, either in this world or the next, that it makes no difference whether persuasion is accepted or not. There is an objective order that works its way out even if we are not persuaded by the truth. This world, for whatever else it is, is a serious place. Our deeds and thoughts are significant, even eternally significant, as Maritain often recognized when writing on the person. The intellect cannot avoid thinking of the penalty that comes both in the civil order and in the supernatural order to which man is ordained when he is persuaded against and chooses against the good, against being.

It is a frequent sentiment in the history of thought, which Maritain himself seems to have at least entertained, to propose that in the end, everyone is saved, whatever he or she did. We know that, theologically, no matter what we do, we can be forgiven. This is the first teaching of revelation. But this forgiveness stands on the condition of our recognizing that something is actually wrong. Even the angels, though they do not live in time, need not have chosen against the supernatural life to which they were invited. God need not have invited them to anything, just as He need not have created anything, including ourselves. Forgiveness, however, is not proper to the angelic lot simply because of the clarity of their natural knowledge. But the principle remains the same. To forgive free acts, they must be recognized for what they are and so acknowledged.

At the root of all evil lies free will. The only way to forgive a will that has chosen itself as its own end is for it to choose the good, not itself, as its proper good. It has to reverse the sin of *Genesis*, as it were, the claim of finite beings to be the cause of the distinction of good and evil. Not even God can change this condition. Maritain’s speculations on this topic, good-willed as they are, do seem to involve a contradiction that would make the free will something other than what it was created to be, that is, a power of ultimate consequences.

Yet, the Maritain of “The End of Machiavellianism” did not appear overly to exalt human autonomy or the likelihood that human reason alone could succeed in the worthy political goals and institutions that seemed necessary or advisable in an intellectually and religiously divided world. “I do not believe that in politics men can escape the temptation of Machiavellianism,” Maritain wrote,

if they do not believe that there exists a supreme government of the universe, which is, properly speaking, divine, for God—the head of the cosmos—is also the head of this particular order which is that of ethics. Nor is escape from the temptation possible if they do not entrust the providence of God with the care of all that superempirical, dark and mysterious disentanglement of the fructification of good and evil which no human eye can perceive—

thus closing their eyes, by faith, as regards the factual achievements in the distant future, while they open their eyes and display by knowledge and prudence, more watchfulness than any fox or lion, as regards the preparations of these achievements and the seeds to be put right now into the earth.<sup>14</sup>

While Machiavelli had advised the Prince to be prepared to act with the strength of the lion and the slyness of the fox to attain his end of acquiring and keeping power, not worrying about the selection of means in terms of good and evil, Maritain advised modern democracies to use their brains and their strength in a consistently moral way.

No doubt following this advice will mean often enough defeats, being outwitted by the real Machiavellian princes and republics, but also doing them in at times. We are not to worry about Machiavelli's taunt that those who live by reason and revelation must conform themselves to necessary defeat at the hands of those who live less scrupulously. Machiavellianism must be faced, but with the only powers that can confront it in its very disorder. "A merely natural political morality is not enough to provide us with the means of putting its own rules into practice," Maritain wrote. Surely this means that Maritain here understood the limits of his own proposals about civil order.

Moral conscience does not suffice, if it is not at the same time religious conscience. What is able to face Machiavellianism . . . is not a just politics appealing to natural forces of man, it is Christian politics. For, in the existential context in the life of mankind, politics, because it belongs by its very essence to the ethical realm, demands consequently to be helped and strengthened, in order not to deviate and in order to attain a sufficiently perfect point of maturity, by everything man receives, in his social life itself, from religious belief and from the word of God working within him.<sup>15</sup>

Maritain went on immediately to point out that this sort of Christian politics, in its own way, is what we find in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

It seems clear, however, that modern democracies are going in another direction. They do not "hold these truths to be self-evident . . ." Maritain here is making a pragmatic point that by reason we can ascertain that human nature is not sufficient by itself continually to accomplish virtue and right order. He also suggested that if some religious doctrine or practice does aid where ethics

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Maritain, "The End of Machiavellianism," p. 312.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 312-13.

and politics normally fail, this method should not be excluded or hindered within the polity that needs something other than itself. It is precisely this practical and theoretical exclusion that has characterized democracies since Maritain's time—something that, paradoxically, indicates the truth of Maritain's original point.

The fact is, as Ralph McInerny, among others, has argued, Maritain's proposals about the democratic charter have failed precisely because the theoretical justification of these proposals and the practical agreements to carry them out do not in fact guarantee the rights that Maritain thought he was protecting. "An agreement that is not one of substance, asserting the same meaning of the same words and the same scheme of justification," McInerny wrote, "is no agreement at all. There is no shortcut to such agreement. As MacIntyre suggests, the Universal Declaration (of Human Rights) resides on a fiction."<sup>16</sup> McInerny does not think, however, that Maritain had no grounds for establishing the presence of natural law in any agreement on practical affairs, but they had to be spelled out much more carefully, and not presumed to exist before there was agreement, even on words.

Midgley's concern about the evolution of Maritain's reflections on evil and McInerny's frank acknowledgment of the weakness of Maritain's proposals at the international level serve to return, it seems to me, to Maritain's original treatment of Machiavellianism. With the serious consequences and intellectual disorders immediately before him, Maritain clearly saw the need for brains and strength. The definitive nature and consequences of evil were more grounded in a proper analysis of St. Thomas. Maritain's crypto-utopianism, if I might put it that way, seems to be rooted in his forgetting how strongly he reacted to actual Machiavellianism. If Maritain could safely deposit Lucifer in Limbo, surely he could do the same for Hitler and Machiavelli even as their terrible deeds were carried out, a proposition that seems to make a mockery of the whole enterprise. Ironically, no social order is safe unless evil deeds are called evil and an order of grace that is not political is operative within the body politic. Midgley was right in worrying about where some of Maritain's arguments on the mitigation of eternal punishment might lead him. The work of Maritain always should lead us, as Maritain himself would have had it, back to the Angelic Doctor. When it came to dealing with the difficulty in confronting Machiavellianism, Maritain had it pretty much right in "The End of Machiavellianism," in his one essay where he almost seems himself to be a crypto-Machiavellian in clarifying how in being just and strong, we need not abandon our brains.

<sup>16</sup> Ralph McInerny, *Art and Prudence: Studies in the Thought of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 135.