

Machiavelli's Rhetoric and the *Mandragola*

Spencer Krauss
Clemson University

Abstract

In this paper I attempt to show that the study of Niccolò Machiavelli's comedy *Mandragola* can help political scientists to understand Machiavelli's rhetorical strategy in his chief political writings. I argue that the play's central character, the faithless sponger and former marriage broker Ligurio, succeeds in his effort to secure a good outcome for himself and his co-conspirators because he employs a strategy that involves securing his co-conspirators' assent to an initial (usually radical or morally dubious) course of action ("Plan A") and then withdrawing his initial proposal in favor of a second (more moderate) one ("Plan B"). I suggest that Machiavelli makes use of the same strategy in his political writings: He proposes one course of action, not that his readers might follow through with it, but that they might be prepared to accept another proposal that, without such preparation, they might be inclined to resist.

Students of political science have weighty and obvious reasons for studying Machiavelli's political writings. That they might profit from a careful study of his comedy *Mandragola* is less clear. Apart from a few stray references to the Italian Wars and the corruption of the Catholic Church (Machiavelli 1981, 12-13, 28-29, 49), the play appears to have little to say about politics: a miserable lover, a not-very-astute *dottore*, an ill-living frate, and a former marriage broker—these are the men of whom Machiavelli makes sport, not princes or founders of commonwealths (Machiavelli 1981, 10). Yet, notwithstanding its apparent lack of political content, the play appears to lend itself to a political interpretation:¹ Modern scholars, at any rate, have been inclined to view it as instructing readers in the princely art by providing them with a gripping portrait of those passions that would-be rulers must learn to master.² Their suggestion finds support in the fact that Machiavelli frequently reminds his readers of his debt to Xenophon (Machiavelli 1998, 60; Machiavelli 1996, 130, 155, 262, 266-68, 298)—“the rhetorician Xenophon,” as he is often called in his manuscripts—whose Socrates once claimed that “attending to private affairs differs only in terms of multitude from attending to public ones” since “those who attend to public affairs don’t deal with any other human beings than those whom they deal with in private” (Xenophon 1994, 80 [= *Memorabilia* 3.4.12 and context]). Not unreasonably, then, may we expect to learn something about Machiavelli’s political teaching from this apparently apolitical work.

This paper will argue that a careful reading of the *Mandragola* can help political scientists to understand a key feature of the rhetorical strategy that Machiavelli employs in his political writings, a feature that, as it seems to me, is not well understood. I will attempt to show, by means of a close reading of the text, that the play’s central character, the faithless sponger Ligurio, succeeds in his effort to secure a good outcome for himself and his co-conspirators

because he employs a strategy that involves securing his co-conspirators' assent to an initial (usually radical or morally dubious) course of action ("Plan A") and then withdrawing his initial proposal in favor of a second (more moderate) one ("Plan B"). I will argue, by way of conclusion, that Machiavelli employs the same strategy in his political writings: he proposes one course of action, not that we might follow through with it, but that we might be prepared to accept another proposal that, without such preparation, we might be inclined to resist.

Prologue

The play begins with a polite greeting that soon gives way to an impolite observation: it appears that comedians must make themselves agreeable to their audience—just as, perhaps, men must make themselves agreeable to God—in order to be treated kindly. The comedian who makes this observation says that he wants to make his audience understand a new case born in their city. But, as he also says, he will want to make them understand this new case only if they continue to observe a polite silence.

The scene today, he says, is Florence; another time it will be Rome or Pisa: a thing to break your jaws with laughter. In this city three buildings and one street are to be observed. First there is the house of a simple-minded *dottore*, a man "who learned in Buethius [*sic*] a great deal of law" (Machiavelli 1981, 9); fitted into the corner by his house is the Street of Love (*La Via dello Amore*); opposite is the church where a certain prior or abbot dwells; on the other side of the church is the house owned by an exceptionally courteous youth, who loved, and tricked, a young woman, a shrewd one. "And I would wish," our author says, "that you might be tricked as she was" (Machiavelli 1981, 10).³

Four characters are mentioned, without being named, in the play's first lines: Messer Nicia, Frate Timoteo, Callimaco, and Lucrezia. Shortly thereafter three of these four are

mentioned again: Callimaco, Messer Nicia, and Frate Timoteo. In the second list the pious (but deceived) Lucrezia is replaced by the parasitic (and undeceived) Ligurio (Mansfield 2000, 8). Of the four characters mentioned in the second list, only Ligurio lacks a house on the stage. Since the stage represents the city, we might infer that he is not altogether at home in the city. He might seem to have nothing but a street or a way (*una via*). Should we take Ligurio to be a stand-in for Machiavelli, as is usually done?⁴ Is the man who knows his way around the city the man who knows the things of love?

Act I

Act I begins with a young Florentine gentleman named Callimaco explaining to his servant Siro why he has abandoned his tranquil, happy, and secure life in Paris in order to return to war-torn Italy. It seems he cannot explain himself—he cannot make sense of his apparently marvelous departure—without first reminding Siro of the circumstances surrounding his expatriation. As he says, he was but a boy of ten when he moved to Paris: He did not choose to go there but was sent by his caretakers, who minded him after his parents' death. He remained in Paris for as long as he did because, on coming of age, he heard reports of Charles' invasion and judged it safer for him to remain in France, among the desecrators of Italy, than to repatriate himself. Thus resolved, he sold all his belongings in Florence except for his house, and for the next ten years lived in very great happiness, dividing his time between studies, pleasures, and business, pursuing each in such a way that not one interfered with the rest. So happy was he, he might have remained still longer in Paris—living quietly, helping everyone, offending no one—had fortune not intervened by sending to Paris a certain Cammillo Calfucci. One day, he says, as he was dining and talking with his fellow expatriates, a dispute arose over whether Italian or French women were more beautiful. Callimaco, for his part, could hardly judge of the matter

since he had left Italy prior to his being cognizant of such things. But he was struck by the vehemence, not to say zeal, with which Cammillo praised a certain relative of his, Madonna Lucrezia, the wife of one Nicia Calfucci. Cammillo's vehement praise of Lucrezia—of both her beauty and manners—was such as to awaken in Callimaco a desire to see her for himself. It was the desire to see an exceptionally beautiful woman—or to test the high praise of Cammillo—that caused him to leave off every other deliberation, or to stop thinking about his safety, and to return to war-torn Italy.

If Callimaco's first desire was to see the woman, or to confirm the truth of what he had heard, his second desire was to be with her. Callimaco was not content simply to see and to know: he yearned to be, if not her husband, at least her lover. As of this moment, five things have prevented him from satisfying his desire. First, Lucrezia has an honest nature, one in all ways alien to the things of love. Second, her lawful husband is middle-aged; hence his natural death is not to be hoped for. Third, no relative or neighbor ever invites her to any social gathering; hence there is no possibility of arranging a chance encounter. Fourth, no tradespeople visit her at home; hence no trade (or banausic art) may be exploited to gain access to her. Fifth, her maids and servants are all reverently fearful and therefore incorruptible. In short: she dwells in an impregnable fortress: she never goes out, she never lets anyone in, and she has surrounded herself with an army of loyal defenders. But Callimaco is not without hope of success. Of the weaknesses he might exploit, he mentions first the simplicity of the *dottore*, Lucrezia's husband; second, the longing that Lucrezia and Messer Nicia have for children; and, third, the easy manners of Lucrezia's mother, Sostrata.

Siro wants to know if Callimaco has taken any steps to secure his prize. Callimaco informs him that he has taken one step: he has befriended a certain Ligurio, a former marriage

broker who of late has taken to begging for his meals. Ligurio's poverty might seem to explain his interest in the youth: He hopes to acquire much wealth. He has promised to persuade Messer Nicia and his wife to go to the baths, since, as he has led Callimaco to believe, were Lucrezia to be exposed to the dissolute atmosphere of the baths, she would change her nature. From honest and in all ways alien to erotic matters she would become dishonest and familiar with erotic matters. Let us call this plan—the plan that entails the changing of Lucrezia's nature—Plan A. If Siro has reservations about this plan, to which his master has wedded his hopes, he does not share them. He says only that it is “not bad.”

When we first meet Ligurio, as we do in the next scene, he is applying himself to Messer Nicia while Callimaco watches in secret. From their conversation we learn that, although he wants children very badly, Messer Nicia is extremely reluctant to leave Florence. He does not want to be uprooted. Besides this, all the doctors he has consulted have given conflicting advice: one tells him to go one place; another, to another. Not unreasonably he has drawn the conclusion that all these doctors are so many big fools. Ligurio declines to address the doctors' incompetence and instead addresses Messer's unwillingness to be uprooted. He says he supposes that Messer Nicia does not want to be uprooted because he is not accustomed to losing sight of the cathedral. Messer Nicia corrects Ligurio: when he was younger, he was quite used to losing sight of the cathedral. Ligurio tests this claim by asking Messer Nicia about the sights he must have seen as a young runaround. Messer Nicia tells Ligurio that he could not endure the sight of the sea—“nothing but water, water, water” (Machiavelli 1981, 16)—but he enjoyed seeing town fairs and fortresses (we note that Messer Nicia corrects Ligurio when he misremembers—or pretends to misremember—the name of a fortress in the foreign city of Pisa). As for the doctors,

he would have Ligurio speak to them on his behalf; he cannot make his own way among so many learned disagreements.

Alone on the street, Ligurio reflects on the weakness of the old wisdom, the proverbial wisdom.⁵ That wisdom is refuted, or very nearly refuted, by fortune's empire over things. Because of fortune, a man who deserves an excellent wife often ends up with a beast, and vice-versa, a prudent woman with a madman. It seems that justice has no force because of fortune. According to Ligurio, Messer Nicia does not deserve an excellent wife because he is mad or exceedingly foolish. And Lucrezia is indeed an excellent wife. At first glance, she appears to be the opposite of Ligurio: whereas Ligurio is extremely bad, Lucrezia is extremely good. It seems she has a claim to wisdom and fitness to rule that even the wicked cannot help admiring. But Ligurio will succeed in corrupting her or bringing her over to his side. He will show her to be unwise or unfit to rule. At the same time, he will show himself to be a proficient corrupter, that is, a man competent to lead others to his own point of view. Could it be that this faithless corrupter has some concern with proving that, although he might seem to be merely "a pleasant man" (Machiavelli 1981, 14, bottom; compare 10, bottom), he is in fact a man of supreme competence? Could it be that he is far more concerned with proving his competence—or the needfulness of that art for which, until recently, he took pay—than he is with securing a wage?

On catching sight of Callimaco in his hiding-place, Ligurio asks him what he wants. Callimaco says he wants to hear how things went with the *dottore*. Ligurio informs him that he has succeeded in persuading Messer Nicia to take his wife to the baths. But now Ligurio says he thinks it will not provide what is needed. Callimaco wants to know why. It turns out there are several reasons why it would be a bad idea to expose Lucrezia to the baths. First: Lucrezia might meet someone who is richer or more courteous than Callimaco; hence, while toiling for his own

sake, he might end up serving others. Second: Lucrezia might be made harder—more piously resistant, more honest and chaste—by having many suitors. Third: Lucrezia, on being tamed by Callimaco, might bestow her favors on another; hence, while toiling for his own sake, Callimaco might end up serving others. In short: there is no guarantee that, on being corrupted, Lucrezia will want Callimaco; he may not be the most desirable suitor, perhaps because he is not the most cunning, dishonest, or dissolute. That Callimaco is unlikely to succeed in his endeavor the youth can hardly deny. But, as he says, he has been rendered desperate by love, and, since death is the alternative to erotic success, he is prepared to do anything, however great, dangerous, harmful, or scandalous—however bestial, cruel, or nefarious—provided that it give him hope. Ligurio forbids the youth from speaking thus and enjoins him to curb his rash spirit. Callimaco responds by confessing himself to be so desperate that, as he says, he will accept even a false hope: not only will he *do* anything; he will *believe* anything. It is necessary, then, in his view, that they follow through with their plan of sending Messer Nicia and Lucrezia to the baths, or that they come up with some other way of feeding his hope and relieving him of at least some of his fears.

There is, however, a further difficulty. Though prepared to accept even a false hope, provided that it nourish a pleasant thought, Callimaco is fearful lest he be cheated. He knows that Ligurio, who belongs to a disreputable class of men and who, as is said, makes his living by cheating others, may deceive him. He trusts Ligurio only because he knows that Ligurio stands to profit from their arrangement and will suffer greatly if he should be caught thwarting him. Ligurio hastens to assure Callimaco that their blood is in perfect accord: even if the profit that Ligurio senses and hopes for were not there, he would still want the youth to satisfy his desire. Callimaco does not challenge this claim. Apparently he is not the least bit concerned that Ligurio himself might be interested in Lucrezia. He appears to be altogether indifferent to the question of

whether he ought to want what Ligurio wants. Ligurio, for his part, has no desire to dwell on the subject of ends. He tells Callimaco that he would like the youth to pretend to be a doctor so as to deceive Messer Nicia. Callimaco wants to know why this deception is necessary. Ligurio tells him that it would permit them to send Messer Nicia to whatever bath they might like; in addition, it would permit them to take another course of action that would be shorter, more certain, and more likely to succeed than the baths. The prospect of a shorter route gives Callimaco new life; but it turns out that he cannot rest satisfied in a hope that may prove to be ill-founded. His joy in hope is tainted by fear.

As for the shorter route—let us call it Plan B—Ligurio is not yet prepared to say what it is. It is clear, however, that it will require the cooperation of a number of people who are not disposed to cooperate. Perhaps their cooperation may be secured only if they are kept in ignorance of the full design. Surely Ligurio is the only conspirator who is not blind or operating on the basis of trust. The principal advantage he adduces of doing things his way is that the shortness of the time will prevent a thorough investigation of the matter and foreclose any doubts or objections (compare Mansfield 2000, 12-13). But the very thing that Ligurio and Callimaco intend to use against Messer Nicia—the shortness of time—Ligurio could also use against Callimaco. Could it be that Ligurio wants Callimaco to act quickly against Messer Nicia so that *he*, Ligurio, might complete his *own* design before *Callimaco* can figure it out?

Act II

Act II begins with Ligurio trying to persuade Messer Nicia to defer to the advice of Callimaco. He tells Messer Nicia that Callimaco is a doctor—not indeed an Italian doctor, but a French doctor. (Are French doctors wiser than Italian doctors?) Messer Nicia wants to test Callimaco’s knowledge, or Ligurio’s high praise, so they go to see Callimaco in person. When

Ligurio calls at his door, Messer Nicia is disturbed by the fact that Ligurio fails to use the correct honorific in referring to Callimaco (he does not say “Maestro”). When Ligurio assures Messer Nicia that Callimaco cares nothing for such trifles, Messer Nicia enjoins him to speak as he should, or do as he should, irrespective of the consequences.

Callimaco answers the door with a brusque, not to say rude, question: “Who is it that wants me?” Messer Nicia declines to answer and instead gives a polite greeting; he is greeted politely in turn. Lest they make two fires, Ligurio demands of the two men that they speak in a language that he can understand (he would rather they not speak Latin). Returning once again to the vulgar tongue, Callimaco asks on what good business the two men have come (“What do you want?”). Messer Nicia replies that he is looking to make trouble for himself and others: he wants children, which are trouble, and to acquire them he is now troubling Callimaco. Callimaco assures Messer Nicia that all his studies would have been for naught had they not rendered him capable of serving virtuous and good men such as Messer Nicia. Messer Nicia thanks Callimaco for this nicety and, in deference to the fact that no man serves another *gratis*, offers his legal services to the young master, should he ever need them, as a token of gratitude.

Having exchanged these pleasantries, the two men proceed to business. Because Callimaco already knows what the problem is—he knows because Ligurio told him; Messer Nicia is too ashamed to say—they must now investigate its cause. Knowledge of the cause of the problem is the condition for the discovery of a remedy—if, that is, there should be a remedy. Not all problems have remedies. For example, there is no remedy for impotence. Messer Nicia laughs off the suggestion that he might be impotent because he is, as he says, exceptionally tough and vigorous. He hopes only that a remedy may be found that will not require a trip to the baths. Ligurio now dares to speak in his own name on behalf of the doctor: there is indeed such a

remedy. Callimaco and Messer Nicia learn at the same time that the remedy is a certain potion. On learning this, Callimaco pretends as if he possesses a certain knowledge that he hides from strangers so as not to be mistaken for a charlatan. Messer Nicia begs to be entrusted with this knowledge. He is so impressed by the youth's pomp and courtesy that he declares himself willing to believe or do anything that the learned doctor might wish. Ligurio bids Callimaco to bid Messer Nicia to fetch a specimen from Lucrezia so that they might proceed with their investigation. Messer Nicia departs at once after restating his faith in the youth.

Siro accompanies Messer Nicia to the *dottore's* house to collect the required specimen. On the way there, Messer Nicia praises Siro's master and laments the fact that the Florentines have no appreciation for virtue. Siro is a model of propriety: he says nothing that does not flatter Messer, who, on his own account, is held in so little esteem he cannot find a dog to bark at him. (Messer Nicia is unusually frank with Siro: perhaps he trusts him because Maestro trusts him.) While Messer Nicia collects the specimen, Siro confesses, in an aside, that he has no respect for Messer but hides his contempt for fear of his life. He must hold back laughter when Messer Nicia returns with a urine bottle in his hand (compare Mansfield 2000, 45). We learn that the specimen in question was acquired with much labor because, although Lucrezia wants children even more than her husband does, she is not prepared to do anything base to acquire them. Siro counsels the husband to have patience and use kind words since, as he says, kind words are usually effective with women. Having gotten what they came for, the two men return to Callimaco's house to learn the cause of Messer Nicia's troubles. Callimaco pretends to identify the cause (Lucrezia's weak kidneys) and then offers to prepare the remedy: a potion made from the *mandragola*, which, as he says, he has tested two pairs of times and always found to be true.

Messer Nicia is eager to proceed with the cure. But now the youth takes it upon himself to reveal that the promised remedy brings with it a certain evil, indeed, an evil that could seem to be without remedy: the man who lies with Lucrezia after she has taken the potion will die within eight days. Messer Nicia receives this disclosure with extreme anger. He had gotten his hopes up, and now they've been dashed. Fortunately, Callimaco has another remedy: Messer Nicia may make another man to sleep with his wife so as to draw off the infection of the mandrake. On hearing this proposal—a proposal that he himself would never have dared to suggest—Messer Nicia does not allow his anger to induce a breach of propriety; he merely protests: “I don't want to do this.” When asked why, he responds that, though he does indeed want a child, he does not want to make his wife a whore or himself a cuckold. (Messer Nicia says nothing about the death of the accomplice.) Callimaco tries to win Messer Nicia over by asserting, without evidence, that many great men have done the same thing. Messer Nicia, who wants to imitate the actions of great men, is very nearly persuaded. But he cannot see how they will acquire a man willing to do the necessary things: for if Messer Nicia tells him the truth—that he will die—the man will never agree to help, and if he deceives him, Messer Nicia will be punished by a criminal tribunal. Since Messer Nicia has no weightier objection than this—the possibility that he himself might come to harm—Callimaco unfolds as much of the plan as he himself knows. Messer Nicia is prepared to agree to everything; the real problem, he says, is his wife. How will they dispose her to do things Callimaco's way?

It is Ligurio who offers the next remedy: Lucrezia's confessor. When Messer Nicia expresses concern that he won't be able to persuade his wife to speak to her confessor, Ligurio offers yet another remedy: Lucrezia's mother, Sostrata, with whom he has some acquaintance.

He does not explain how he came to be acquainted with her. But he does say that he knows that she is of their opinion, and she may be able to dispose Lucrezia favorably toward their plan.

Thus resolved, Ligurio and Messer Nicia set off to prepare Sostrata for their use; later, they will prepare the frate. Ligurio does not invite Callimaco along. This distresses Callimaco: he cannot bear the thought of being alone. Because the youth has no business to attend to, Ligurio counsels him to walk the city streets: for in a great city there is much to see. But Callimaco, having been corrupted by love, has no appetite for sight-seeing or the education it might bring. It seems that his chief concern now is escaping death, or the painful awareness of death, by giving himself over to the pleasure that attends hope and love.⁶

Act III

Act III begins with Ligurio and Messer Nicia pressing Lucrezia's mother Sostrata to join them in the conspiracy. Strangely, it is Sostrata who appears to be doing the persuading: she prepares Messer Nicia to adopt the prudent course—which, in this case, is in competition with the dictates of conscience—by presenting the prudent course as morally obligatory. Messer Nicia, for his part, is prepared to yield to her wisdom, the old wisdom. Ligurio therefore bids Sostrata to fetch Lucrezia while he and Messer Nicia relate the case to Lucrezia's confessor. Because he fears that Messer Nicia may spoil everything with his stupidity, Ligurio forbids his co-conspirator from speaking to the frate until signaled to do so (Ligurio will close one eye and bite his lip). Messer Nicia consents. But no sooner has he consented than Ligurio changes tacks. He bids Messer Nicia pretend to be deaf; that way, Ligurio may indicate when Messer Nicia is to speak by simply raising his voice. We see that, once again, Ligurio has employed two plans, two stratagems: Plan A = Ligurio will give a covert (silent) signal to Messer Nicia indicating when he is to speak; Plan B = Messer Nicia will pretend to be deaf, and Ligurio will shout.

The secret communication is to be done by means of shouting.

What is the effect of this peculiar strategy? We see that, on first perceiving Ligurio and Messer Nicia, Frate Timoteo welcomes them as he would any visitors: softly and politely. But, on being informed by Ligurio that Messer Nicia is quite deaf, he begins to shout; shouting, he dispenses with formalities: he stops calling Messer Nicia “Messer.” (We recall that Messer Nicia had been disturbed by Ligurio’s failure to call Callimaco “Maestro.”) Not wanting to fill the whole piazza with noise, the frate is prepared to do what, in other circumstances, he would not have done: he will ignore Messer Nicia and discourse solely with his companion. The shouting, the harsh and loud speaking, effects a change in propriety.

Messer Nicia having been disposed of, Ligurio begins to weave his web. First he offers alms to Frate Timoteo to assist him with a strange case on which all the honor of Messer’s house depends. As he says, a distant relative of Messer—the daughter of one Cammillo Calfucci—has gotten herself pregnant out of wedlock, notwithstanding the preventative measures taken by her caretakers. Now, in exchange for 300 ducats, Ligurio wants the frate to persuade the abbess who runs the convent where the girl is staying to give the girl a potion that will induce a miscarriage. The frate proves amenable to this plan, so Ligurio gives him 25 ducats as a down payment. But then, just when he is about to disclose the convent in question, he quits the conversation to speak to a woman beckoning to him from the church. When he returns, some moments later, he informs Timoteo that he just learned that the girl has miscarried all by herself. Fortune took care of the difficulty. Timoteo, for his part, is eager to assure Ligurio that the 300 ducats will not go to waste: they will go to the Grascia. Now it is Ligurio’s turn to pretend to be deaf. Timoteo corrects himself: Ligurio *ought* to give the ducats. But Ligurio is not about to hand over the rest of the ducats just yet. First he presses the frate to do another task. The frate, who is no fool, now

realizes that Ligurio told his story, and made his first request, in order to test him. Once Timoteo showed his true colors as a “man of religion” (Machiavelli 1981, 32), Ligurio withdrew the first request (the termination of a pregnancy) and made the second, less scandalous one (the inducing of a pregnancy that will, as Timoteo later puts it, “acquire a soul for our Lord”: Machiavelli 1981, 35). The first request (Plan A) was shocking; the second request (Plan B) is less shocking. Now, having proposed an exchange of goods and services that will be “less burdensome, less scandalous, more agreeable to us, more profitable to you” (Machiavelli 1981, 33), Ligurio bids the frate discuss the matter further in the church.

At the same time as Ligurio is preparing Timoteo, Sostrata is preparing Lucrezia. Lucrezia’s first words give voice to her fear that her husband’s longing for a child will drive them both into error. As she says (and believes she believes), even if she were the last woman on earth and human nature had to rise again from her, she would not believe it right submit her body to another man and cause his death. She does not say she would not do it; she says only that she would not be able to believe that such a course would be allowed to her. The crucial question, then, is whether or not she can be made to believe that it *is* allowed to her. Sostrata applies herself to this task with the help of Frate Timoteo.

The corruption of Lucrezia, which is depicted in the next scene, takes place in the inner sanctum of the church. Timoteo begins by assuring Lucrezia that he has found many things in his books, both in particular and in general, that support their endeavor. In making his case, he appeals to two general principles. First: one ought to prefer a certain good (in this case, acquiring a soul for the Lord) to an uncertain evil (the death of the accomplice, which, as Timoteo insists, is not a necessity). Second: one ought to look to the end in all things. Lucrezia’s end, according to Timoteo, is to fill a seat in paradise or make her husband happy. Of course, the whole

difficulty, from Lucrezia's point of view, is that her husband would have her do something that would seem to deprive her of a seat in paradise. Timoteo and Sostrata obscure the difficulty by reminding her of the great goods that stand to be acquired: She will acquire a soul for the Lord; she will make her husband happy; and she will escape the misery that befalls childless widows. When Timoteo swears that, whatever sin she may commit, it can be washed away with holy water, Lucrezia is very nearly persuaded. But she continues to fear that she will suffer death as a punishment. Her last words in the scene—which constitute her final protest—might remind us of her husband's final objection to the conspiracy (Machiavelli 1981, 25, bottom).

Act IV

Act IV begins with Callimaco alone, reflecting on his situation: the more he hopes, the more he fears that his hopes will be dashed. He cannot rest secure in his hopes. He is miserable no matter what. Now, while Callimaco is reflecting on his misery, Ligurio is looking for him to give him the good news and bid him to prepare the potion. At length he finds him. Callimaco is overjoyed to learn that Lucrezia has given her consent. But then he realizes that there is another difficulty, namely, that he told Messer Nicia that he would assist in catching the man who is to draw off the infection of the mandrake. But if he, Callimaco, is among those who capture the man, he cannot be the man who sleeps with Lucrezia.

A moment's thought is sufficient to produce a remedy. Ligurio will disguise Frate Timoteo as Callimaco. Callimaco, for his part, will pretend to be a poor musician. Callimaco likes this plan, but he fears that he will be recognized if he does not wear a mask. Ligurio forbids him from wearing a mask. Instead, he counsels the youth to scrunch up his face, open or screw up his mouth, or grind his teeth, close one eye. In a word: he should disfigure himself. Callimaco is prepared to do what Ligurio commands—he has no trouble understanding Ligurio,

notwithstanding his verbal contortions—but he has a hard time making himself look ugly. When, at length, he finally succeeds, Ligurio offers to provide him with a fake nose. (Ligurio, who is no stranger to deceit, says he keeps one at home.) The difficulty having been disposed of, Callimaco wants to know how Ligurio and the others will proceed. Ligurio discloses as much of the plan as he himself can control. What remains after that must fall to Callimaco. Callimaco has no doubt he will be able to do what is required of him when the time comes; he needs nothing from Ligurio but the opportunity. But, as it turns out, in Ligurio's view Callimaco is not sufficiently ambitious: he believes he will be satisfied by a single encounter with Lucrezia when in fact he will not be satisfied. Ligurio therefore raises the youth's ambition to new heights; he suggests that, if he plays his cards well, he might perform Nicia's office many times, without scandal. Callimaco is astonished. All he has to do, to enjoy an almost inconceivable happiness, is speak persuasively when the time comes (ardor alone will not suffice). Before the youth can begin to reflect on the happiness held out before him, or the means of acquiring it, Ligurio reminds him of the late hour and the need for haste, and the two men part.

The next scene begins with Callimaco summoning his servant, Siro, who has been silent for some time. Siro does not answer the call the way he did at the beginning of the play. Instead, he uses the polite honorific "sir." Only when Callimaco calls him still closer does he employ the old biblical refrain "Here I am." Callimaco wants Siro to deliver the potion to Messer Nicia. He is not worried that his servant will betray him because he knows that he is a good rogue who sees through appearances, who has therefore guessed the whole design, and who has shown himself to be accommodating. Siro agrees to do his master's bidding. But when we next meet him, he is making mischief, saying a thousand mad things, endangering Callimaco's (or Ligurio's) design. He seems to have little concern with ensuring that his "mad master" and "this wretch Ligurio"

succeed in their endeavor.⁷ He seems to want little more than to conduct his own affairs without suffering harm (Machiavelli 1981, 15, 23; compare 13, bottom). In consequence, he must be commanded to obey Ligurio, who appears to have a greater concern with the satisfaction of Callimaco's desires.

It is getting late, so the conspirators don their disguises and gather at the corner while, off in the distance, Callimaco begins to play his little song. In the waning light, with all the men in disguise, it is hard to say who serves whom.⁸ To Siro, Messer Nicia looks like a servant; to Ligurio, he looks like a pompous fool. Messer Nicia, for his part, initially fails to recognize his co-conspirators. He recoils in terror on seeing them and must be assured by Ligurio that they are not the beasts they seem to be but his well-meaning helpers and partners. To save face he reasserts his manliness and perspicacity. He assures his co-conspirators that he, too, can see through appearances, that he is prepared, if necessary, to use the sword. He then identifies each of the men in disguise. He is especially impressed by the Maestro's disguise, which he examines up close for some time. There follows a diverting exchange between Ligurio and Messer Nicia from which we learn that bitter things are especially repellent to those expecting something mild. The fun is cut short by Ligurio, who, so as not to lose any more time, assumes the role of captain and arranges the men in battle formation. Callimaco (Timoteo) he puts in charge of the right horn; he himself will command the left; the *dottore* will be in the middle; Siro will be the rear-guard, or rather the scout. On investigating the sound of a lute, Siro returns with a report of a possible victim, a fine young man not yet 25 years old (in fact, Callimaco is 30: Machiavelli 1981, 12). Messer Nicia, who fears that an older man may not be able to do what is required of him, approves of the choice. With all due haste, then, the disguised older men seize the youth and bear him to Messer Nicia's house.

It may be appropriate, at this juncture, to give some thought to the question of Messer Nicia's perspicacity: how much of the design did he grasp at the start? We recall that when he first sought a remedy for his childlessness, he gave everyone to understand that he was ignorant of the problem's cause. His "official" account ruled out impotence and implied that in the beginning, at least, of his association with Ligurio and Callimaco, he really did hope to impregnate his wife. That he did in fact cling to such a hope would seem to be attested by his anger at Callimaco when Callimaco informed him that, on giving his wife the potion, he would not be able to have intercourse with her, lest he die (Machiavelli 1981, 25). Still, we cannot help entertaining some doubts about the "official" account, doubts that are strengthened by Messer's conduct throughout the play (consider, in this connection, the admiration he expresses for the subtlety of Maestro Callimaco and the thoroughness with which he examines the body of the young man: Machiavelli 1981, 22, 24, 50-51; compare Martinez 1983, 35-36). But if, as we suspect, the *dottore*'s impotence is the true problem, it is not clear how he could have believed that the potion would serve as a remedy, since it was his wife, not he, who was to drink it (Machiavelli 1981, 25). What, then, could he have hoped for when he entered into the conspiracy? I am aware of two possibilities: either he hoped that another man would perform his conjugal duties and give him the heir (and the reputation) he desired, or he hoped that his wife—perhaps still a virgin—could be made to conceive without intercourse.⁹ As for his anger at Callimaco, which seemed to argue against his impotence, we need not assume that it was dissimulated: he might simply have been vexed by the realization that, if he did not die within eight days, the true cause of his wife's sterility would become known.¹⁰ In the light of these considerations, we might ask: Was Messer Nicia hoping, from the very beginning, to find a virile

young man to use as a stud? Or, on the contrary, did he come to understand, with some help from a professional problem-solver, that this was the unsought-for, but appropriate, solution?

That Messer Nicia failed to grasp the design at the outset is indicated, I believe, by the confusion he expressed, in soliloquy, after being abandoned by Ligurio outside the church (Machiavelli 1981, 33; compare 32). That he was made to catch on, and give his silent assent to the design, is indicated by the pains Ligurio took to ensure that he would see the faces of both Frate Timoteo and Callimaco at the critical moment, just before the conspiracy was to be consummated (compare Turner 2016, 119). As for how Ligurio secured Messer Nicia's assent, we have only to remind ourselves of his preferred strategy, which, in this instance, would appear to have taken the following form: Plan A = Messer Nicia will kidnap and murder a stranger, debase his wife, and cuckold himself; Plan B = Messer Nicia will realize that he has been tricked but will go along with the trick anyway because he will have found a less odious way to get a son: he will just have to let Maestro Callimaco sleep with his wife. Now, Ligurio could not have employed this strategy so effectively had he not possessed some knowledge of the souls of his co-conspirators and their moral and intellectual limits—what sort of innovations they would be prepared to accept, or how far to push them and when (see Flaumenhaft 1978, 39). And this knowledge could have been useful to him only if he knew, in addition, what his co-conspirators longed for most deeply so that, by wedding the strongest passion to the remedy he prescribed, he could ensure their acquiescence to the prescribed remedy. Since the knowledge in question would seem to belong to the domain of his art (Machiavelli 1981)—an art that, for some time at least, has been held in low repute (Machiavelli 1981, 14, bottom)—he might seem to have proved, by the end of the play, that he has something valuable to offer to gentlemen like Messer Nicia and, more generally, to human beings. Was that his intention from the start?

Reflection on the question of Ligurio's intention is bound to underscore just how much he differs from his co-conspirators. From his point of view, all or nearly all of his co-conspirators are mad. The objects they desire are not attractive to him. This is attested by the fact that, though a marriage broker by trade, he remains unwed and childless. The little money he needs he can get by borrowing. As for reputation, if he desires it, he seeks it not through an heir but through the guidance and execution of a conspiracy. He appears to believe he will get what he wants if he can lead his co-conspirators to accept an unorthodox arrangement in which their private interests converge and, indeed, converge in such a way as to guarantee the arrangement's stability (compare Sumberg 1961, 327-28). But will his arrangement—the product of his art—survive more than a few years?¹¹ Will the parties' private interests always converge? Will Lucrezia always be beautiful? Will Callimaco still want to marry her when Messer dies (if indeed he dies first)? Will Lucrezia still want to marry *him* (consider Machiavelli 1981, 17; compare Mansfield 2000, 11)? Questions of this nature might lead one to wonder whether the arrangement brought about by Ligurio's conspiracy can be said to offer a truly satisfactory solution to the problem at the heart of the play, the problem of happiness. Does it not in fact require the *forgetting* of that problem, or of the conditions that would have to obtain for it to be soluble? Are we too—we audience members, we co-conspirators—not invited to forget that, however crafty his adviser, however virile his accomplice, there is no guarantee that Messer Nicia will get a son (see Machiavelli 1981, 34, top; compare Xenophon 1994, 2-3 [= *Memorabilia* 1.1.8 and context])?

Act V

At dawn the next day Messer Nicia and his co-conspirators emerge from Messer Nicia's house and pretend to release Callimaco from captivity. It is Messer Nicia who does the commanding: he tells his co-conspirators how they ought to hold their accomplice; how far they

ought to go before releasing him; how much they ought to disorient him; what they ought to do to ensure they escape detection; and what they ought to do regarding Maestro Callimaco. Messer Nicia, it seems, is a new man (compare Machiavelli 1981, 46, top, and 48, top); it is as if he has undergone a marvelous conversion: from being utterly deferent, stupid, and helpless, he has become vigorous, commanding, and astute. May we explain this change with reference to the fact that he now believes himself to have secured a son (Machiavelli 1981, 34, top)? Has he changed his nature—or, on the contrary, has he merely become inflamed with new hopes?

Ligurio and Siro are prepared to do what Messer Nicia commanded: they will give Maestro Callimaco the good news. But they don't know what the good news is. As Ligurio reminds him, they have been drinking in the cellar all night, in ignorance of the goings-on upstairs. Messer Nicia therefore must give them a full report. He tells them that, on arriving at his house, where Lucrezia and Sostrata were waiting, he led his captive to a storeroom and forced him to undress. He says he wanted to assure himself that the young man was, in all important respects, a good specimen. For this reason, he not only looked him over: he felt him too. Then, having satisfied himself in this regard, he led him to the bedroom in the dark and put him in bed with Lucrezia. He did not leave the lovers to their business but stuck around to get a feel for things, to make sure that they were proceeding as they should. Then, having satisfied himself on this score as well, he left the bedroom, locked the door, and went to Sostrata, who was waiting by the fire. They spent all night talking. When Ligurio asks what they talked about, Messer Nicia mentions two things: first, his wife's stupidity, or her resistance to persuasion, which caused them much needless suffering; and, second, the baby, the much-hoped-for baby, which he can already imagine holding, and adoring, in his arms.

All things having gone according to plan, Ligurio wants to know what Messer Nicia will do next. Messer Nicia informs him that he intends to go into his house and put on his good clothes. Then he will make his wife get up and wash and go to the church to be blessed. He invites Ligurio and Callimaco to join him in talking to the frate and thanking him and repaying him for the good he has done. Ligurio accepts the invitation on Callimaco's behalf, and the men depart—Ligurio and Siro to Callimaco's house, Messer Nicia to his own. Only Frate Timoteo remains on stage: he has been listening in silence to their talk, having hidden himself from sight. He says to himself that he likes what he has heard, especially the part concerning himself. To maximize his return, he resolves to wait for his co-conspirators at the church, where his merchandise will be worth more. He appears to be altogether satisfied with how things have turned out; he believes he has come out well. Does he judge rightly? Has he correctly perceived what will be to his own long-term advantage, both as a "man of religion" and a representative of the church? Or, on the contrary, has he made the same error as the other *frati*, who have weakened devotion, and therewith the church, through their carelessness (Machiavelli 1981, 49)? However that may be, he surely errs in thinking that, if his co-conspirators do *not* come to repay the debt, he will always have time to find them.

We learn next how Callimaco fared the prior evening. He tells Ligurio—he has already told Ligurio—that he stayed with a troubled mind until morning. Though he took pleasure in the deed, he could not think it good until he had made Lucrezia to know him and to understand the love he bore her and how easily they could live happily and without scandal. Lucrezia, for her part, was won over by these true reasons as well as by his youthful beauty or vigor. She said she wanted him to be her every good, not for one night only, as her husband had wished, but for always. Hearing these words, Callimaco was ready to die on account of their sweetness; he could

not respond with one part of what he wanted to say. Now, speaking to Ligurio, he declares himself to be the happiest, most contented man in the world, and almost the most blessed; the only thing keeping him from blessedness, he says, is his fear that his happiness might fail him, either through death or the passage of time.

When Ligurio asks Callimaco what they ought to do now, the youth suggests that they go to the church, for he had promised Lucrezia he would be there. Lucrezia will indeed meet her lover at the church, but, as we learn in the next scene, she is very tired and loath to do anything—not for fear of God, still less in obedience to her husband. She seems to want mostly to rest. Messer Nicia observes this change but fails to perceive its import since he was not present for Callimaco’s postcoital conversation with Lucrezia or Callimaco’s report of that conversation to Ligurio. He sees in his wife only pride and ingratitude. In fact, the change runs far deeper: from not wanting to be commanded, Lucrezia now *wants* to be commanded—not indeed by her husband Nicia, to whom, in previous years, she submitted only with resistance, and whom now, more than ever, she despises, but by Ligurio’s puppet or pupil, Callimaco (compare Machiavelli 1981, 52, bottom, to 14, 23-24).¹² Messer Nicia is diverted from reflecting on this change by his mother-in-law, Sostrata, who tells him to stop marveling and find the frate. As it turns out, however, there is no need to find the frate since, in the expectation of gain, he is already waiting outside the church.

When, in the company of the women, Messer Nicia approaches the frate, he greets him in Latin and calls him “Padre”; Frate welcomes Messer as he had in Act III, prior to the shouting, and commends Madonna to God’s care. Everything, it seems, has returned to normal: everyone is polite, everyone is gracious, everyone uses the correct honorific (compare Machiavelli 1981, 54, top; 30, bottom; and 20-21). Messer Nicia is eager to introduce Maestro Callimaco to his

wife, that she might know the cause of their having a staff to sustain their old age. He also invites him and Ligurio to dinner and offers them the key to the ground floor room in the loggia, that they might return there at their convenience, since they don't have women at home and live like beasts. Frate Timoteo, fearful of being forgotten, commits the mild impropriety of inquiring after the money that Ligurio had promised him; Messer Nicia promises to send it that very day. When Lucrezia bids her husband give the frate ten *grossi* for the blessing, Messer Nicia makes an ungracious protest that the frate is good enough to ignore. We are reminded that this play is a comedy: everyone who appears in the final scene appears to be happy; everyone appears to have made out well. Almost everyone has forgotten Siro. Ligurio, however, has not forgotten Siro. He appears to have replaced Siro. Surely, by the end of the play, he has shown himself to be the more competent adviser, if not the more trustworthy confidante (compare Machiavelli 1981, 12-13).

Conclusion

Now that we have discussed the play at length, we are in a better position to consider its bearing on Machiavelli's political works. One observation cannot but strike us at the outset. In his political writings Machiavelli appears to assume the guise of a serpentine corruptor—a corruptor especially of the male youth. He exposes us, his readers, to an atmosphere of dissolution; he tempts us with forbidden pleasures; he invites us to acquire carnal knowledge or to experiment with dishonesty. There is a certain similarity, then, between the atmosphere of Machiavelli's writings and the atmosphere of the baths. But, bearing in mind the strategy that we have seen Ligurio use on more than one occasion, we might wonder: Could it be that the shockingly evil teaching found in Machiavelli's political works—the denigration of piety, the explicit endorsement of cruelty, the deprecation of moral virtue—is an exaggeration intended to

prepare his readers to accept a less shocking teaching? In other words, could the surface teaching of Machiavelli's works be equivalent to Ligurio's Plan A?

Let us suppose for a moment that this is true. If the extreme teaching, the shocking teaching, is not the true teaching, what is? What is Machiavelli's Plan B? We recall that at the beginning of the *Mandragola*, Machiavelli speaks of himself as "a man who wishes to seem wise and grave," who "has been cut off from showing with other undertakings other virtue, there being no reward for his labors" (Machiavelli 1981, 10). At the end, the stand-in for Machiavelli, the faithless Ligurio, receives a key and a dinner invitation from the gentleman Messer Nicia. He comes to be a trusted member of Messer Nicia's household—as it were, a citizen in good standing. Could it be that Machiavelli intended to make faithless spongers such as Ligurio more at home in the city? Could it be that he invited his readers to abandon moral virtue (Plan A) merely in order to prepare them to accept a new and radical *reinterpretation* of morality that would prioritize self-interest and destigmatize the pursuit of gain (Plan B)?¹³ Could it be that he intended, with his works, to improve political life by making it more *rational*?

We may be tempted by this interpretation—not least because it suggests a reassuring concordance between Machiavelli's "blood" and our own—but we have reason to doubt it. Is it so clear, after all, that Machiavelli really believed that he could improve political life? Must we not entertain the possibility that he invited us to conquer fortune, or to pursue political reform (Machiavelli 1998, 98-99, 101ff.), only because he wished to prepare us for another, more moderate goal that he had in view? Could it be that he appealed to our political hopes (Plan A) only because he believed that he *had* to do so in order to prepare us to adopt a more resigned, and less hopeful, point of view (Plan B)?

Reasoning along these lines, we might begin to wonder whether we erred in supposing Machiavelli's Plan A to be more radical than his Plan B. After all, a writer who calls for political reform, who invites his readers to indulge their hopes for a more rational politics, might seem, from a certain point of view, to be much more conventional, and therefore much *less* radical, than one who seeks to disabuse his readers of such hopes. That Machiavelli himself put little stock in his Plan A—that he was much more concerned, in the last analysis, with his Plan B—is suggested by the fact that his *Mandragola* portrays almost every character as being invincibly hopeful about the prospect of escaping death. Of course, a suggestion is not a proof: A proof would require a thorough and rigorous study of his political writings. Such a study would need to show, not only that he regarded this hope to be ill-founded, but that he believed it to be bound up with manifestly political goals and that he believed it to be ineradicable. Could this be shown, political scientists would have some ground for believing that, whatever he might have said or invited us to believe, Machiavelli did *not* think that politics could be improved or enlightened, at least not beyond a certain point. And from this it would follow that, whatever differences he might have had with the ancients, he was, in this one, crucial respect, much less revolutionary, much less *modern*, than is usually thought (compare Strauss 1958, 224-25, esp. 225, top).

References

- Behuniak-Long, Susan. 1989. "The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*." *Review of Politics* 51 (Spring): 264-80.
- Flaumenhaft, Mera J. 1978. "The Comic Remedy: Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." *Interpretation* 7(2): 33-74.
- Hullung, Mark. 1978. "Machiavelli's *Mandragola*: A Day and Night in the Life of a Citizen." *Review of Politics* 40 (January): 32-57.
- Lord, Carnes. 1979. "On Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." *The Journal of Politics* 41(3): 806-27.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 1981. *Mandragola*. Mera J. Flaumenhaft, trans. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 1996. *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, trans. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 1998. *The Prince*. Harvey C. Mansfield, trans. 2nd ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mansfield, Harvey C. 2000. "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." In *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*, ed. Vickie B. Sullivan. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1-29.
- Martinez, Ronald L. 1983. "The Pharmacy of Machiavelli: Roman Lucretia in *Mandragola*." *Renaissance Drama* 14: 1-43.
- Palmer, Michael and James F. Pontuso. 1996. "The Master Fool: The Conspiracy of Machiavelli's *Mandragola*." *Perspectives on Political Science* 25 (3): 124-32.
- Plato. 1991. *Republic*. Allan Bloom, trans. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Saxonhouse, Arlene W. 2000. "Comedy, Machiavelli's Letters, and His Imaginary Republics."

In *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*, ed. Vickie B.

Sullivan. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 57-77.

Strauss, Leo. 1958. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.

Sumberg, Theodore A. 1961. "La Mandragola: An Interpretation." *The Journal of Politics* 23 (2): 320-40.

Turner, Brandon. 2016. "Private Vices, Public Benefits: *Mandragola* in Machiavelli's Political Theory." *Polity* 48 (1): 109-132.

Wright, Heather Hadar. 2009. "Lucrezia in *Mandragola*: Machiavelli's New Prince." *Interpretation* 36 (2): 146-64.

Xenophon. 1994. *Memorabilia*. Amy L. Bonnette, trans. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

¹ See, for example, Mansfield (2000, 1): "the *Mandragola* is a heavily politicized comedy" whose "jokes and . . . erotic passions are managed, hence stunted, for the sake of a political end." Compare Lord (1979, 808): "the *Mandragola* . . . contains what may be provisionally described as a synopsis of Machiavelli's political teaching concerning 'the new prince.'" Sumberg (1961), Flaumenhaft (1978), Martinez (1983), and Behuniak-Long (1989) agree that, while hardly the key to Machiavelli's political writings, the play sheds light on how those works are to be understood.

² See Saxonhouse (2000, 59): "Comedies which detail our lives as private creatures provide the understanding of human nature and human potential whereby we can learn to control or adjust to the world in which we live . . . [W]hat lesson are we to learn through this laughter? . . . to behave like—or indeed to be—a prince." Compare Flaumenhaft (1978, 41) and esp. Turner (2016, 110): "Comedies are political because the passions that animate the private sphere cannot stay tidily tucked away; they are built up, expressed, channeled, vented, and otherwise made public in ways that are messy and profoundly consequential for politics." For a helpful overview of the way the play is usually approached by political scientists, see *ibid.*, 111.

³ As Lord (1979, 812), following Sumberg (1961, 325), observes: "This strange remark is not alone in linking Lucrezia to Machiavelli's audience. At the very end of Act IV, Timoteo informs the audience that Callimaco and Lucrezia will remain awake all night, ' . . . because I know that, if I were he and you were she, we would not be sleeping either.' As the prologue makes clear, the audience presupposed by Machiavelli is in the first instance a Florentine audience. It makes sense to identify Lucrezia 'allegorically' with Florence, or more precisely with the Florentine *popolo*." Lord (1979, 814) goes on to argue that "more generally, Lucrezia personifies not merely the Florentine people but the people—the common people—simply." It may be worth noting, in this connection, that in Plato's *Republic* the mandrake is said to have the power to enchant the democratic element of the city so as to permit the non-democratic element to rule: see Plato (1991, 168 [= *Republic* 488c and context]).

⁴ See, for example, Lord (1979), Flaumenhaft (1978), and Hulliung (1978). By contrast, Mansfield (2000) and Palmer and Pontuso (1996) argue that it is Messer Nicia, not Ligurio, who is the true mastermind of the conspiracy; Sumberg (1961), that it is Callimaco; Wright (2009), that it is Lucrezia. More recently, Turner (2016) has argued that any attempt to identify the "master" of the play is misguided because Machiavelli wished to show the unintended (but politically salutary) consequences that result when individuals pursue their own private advantage in what Turner calls an "economy of vice."

⁵ Mansfield (2000, 20) claims that this speech, which begins with the words “I do not believe,” is Ligurio’s first speech. In fact, Ligurio’s first speech—which he utters in Act I, Scene 2—is “Why?” (Machiavelli 1981, 15).

⁶ See Flaumenhaft (1978, 39): “Although Callimaco is energetic and intelligent, he is unable to achieve by himself what he wants for himself. As a result of his desperate passion, he is moody, frenzied, and even foolish. . . . His reason is dedicated to serving an irresistible desire which sometimes reduces him to confusion.”

⁷ While sharing Ligurio’s contempt for Messer Nicia (Machiavelli 1981, 17, 23), Siro appears to be much less enterprising. His idleness might be related to his view of love, which he appears to share with the Xenophontic Socrates: see Xenophon (1994, 20 [= *Memorabilia* 1.3.11 and context]).

⁸ Compare Machiavelli (1981, 11): the author of *Mandragola* “doesn’t stand in awe of anyone / even though he might play the servant to one / who can wear a better coat than he can.”

⁹ Ligurio and Callimaco seem to appeal to precisely this hope when persuading Messer Nicia to adopt their prescribed remedy: consider Machiavelli (1981, 22, 25) in the light of (ibid., 28, bottom). Martinez (1983, 34) notes: “As Callimaco describes it, *mandragola* can be made into a *pozione* that promotes not only fertility, but impregnation itself . . . Callimaco is presumably leaving out an important step when he suggests that the potion will cause pregnancy without further interventions of the male” or when he suggests that conception can occur without seed. Compare Machiavelli (1981, 27): “This Dottore of yours, / longing to have children, / would believe that an ass flies.”

¹⁰ Compare Turner (2016, 116): for Nicia “to acknowledge his impotence is to give up the game. After all, any future son (what Nicia is ‘dying’ to procure) would be suspected as illegitimate.”

¹¹ See Machiavelli (1996, 209): “It is a very true thing that all worldly things have a limit to their life”; compare ibid. (1996, 223): “[W]hen one [conspiracy] has been secret among many men for a long time, it is held a miraculous thing.”

¹² See Flaumenhaft (1978, 39): “By the end of the play, [Ligurio] has won, not only the previously denied privilege of dining with Nicia, but also the keys to his house. If Callimaco is the new ‘ruler’ in that house, Ligurio has ruled the ruler. Thus, he is closely akin to another advisor of princes, to Machiavelli himself.”

¹³ Among the passages of *Mandragola* that might be adduced as evidence in support of this view is the scene in which Callimaco reveals to Ligurio that, although he took pleasure in sleeping with Lucrezia, he could not think it good until he had told her the truth about their situation as he then understood it (Machiavelli 1981, 52). It seems that for all his talk of bestial, cruel, and nefarious deeds (ibid., 17, bottom), the youth preserves, to the end, an attachment to honesty. This suggests that, in Machiavelli’s view, even a man as morally lax as Callimaco will not be able to devote himself to a way of life that, however pleasant, he cannot believe to be (morally) good.