



Frederick G. Whelan. *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought*

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Hume Studies Volume 31, Number 1, (2005) 181 - 183.

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FREDERICK G. WHELAN. *Hume and Machiavelli: Political Realism and Liberal Thought*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004. Pp. xii + 416. ISBN 0-7391-0631-7, cloth, \$90.

Most political theorists agree that modern political thought began with Machiavelli and that David Hume was a modern philosopher who made a notable contribution to political theory. Most philosophers do not spend great amounts of time either with Machiavelli or with Hume's political philosophy, and political theorists (with some Rawlsian exceptions) largely ignore Hume's ethics, epistemology, or histories. Still, it would come as little surprise to either philosophers or political theorists that as a modern political theorist, if not as a philosopher, Hume owes some debt to Machiavelli, whose focus on power, interest, and the vicissitudes of fortune set politics and political theory on their path through the nineteenth century.

Noted Hume scholar Frederick G. Whelan is not content with such easy assumptions, and in this book explores in great depth and with admirable scholarly documentation the relationship between these two members of the "great conversation" of political theory. As Whelan makes clear, what Machiavelli and Hume share is a set of concerns related to political science, statesmanship, and foreign policy, even if, as is often the case, what they actually believe and say about these concerns diverges widely.

Whelan devotes three chapters to an exploration of how both theorists focus on, among others things, the role of self-interest, ambition, custom, and fortune in politics, the rule of law, the need for prudence in leadership, the acceptability of religious influence and of the use of deception. In each of these discussions Whelan succeeds in showing how Hume follows Machiavelli in setting these topics as essential questions for political leaders to answer and according to which to establish their rule. Less successfully demonstrated is much agreement between the two about what the answers should be. Often Whelan is led to conclude that though, for example, both Machiavelli and Hume recognize the urge toward deception in politics, Machiavelli embraces and even encourages both the Prince and republican leaders to break faith, whereas Hume "does not openly advise the necessity of deception, [though] he describes some detailed examples of its use, both successful and unsuccessful (148).

Such demurrals are many throughout the book and taken together cast some doubt on the extent to which the comparison of the two theorists really adds up. Furthermore, though Whelan's discussion of the joint reliance on custom or convention by both theorists is one of the stronger points in his case, even he

recognizes that Machiavelli's overall emphasis on how the Prince is to manage change tends to vitiate the comparison. For Hume, Whelan concludes, "custom, then, is the great guide of human life;" but, "[T]he problem in Machiavelli's analysis is that the ever-fluctuating contours of the political world continually create new circumstances that require innovations on the part of political leaders" (150).

Finally, following Rawls many theorists (including Whelan in his fine 1985 book, *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*, Princeton University Press) might argue that Hume's greatest contribution to political theory is his discussion of the centrality of justice in politics and how justice itself relies on custom and convention for its meaning. It is curious therefore that Whelan devotes so little ink to exploring Machiavelli's influence in this regard, though even he acknowledges that the almost complete absence of a concern with justice in Machiavelli's thought "distinguishes his political theory significantly from Hume's as well as from other liberal theories" (63).

In the final two chapters, which together represent the heart of the innovative thesis of this book, Whelan rises above the asymmetries in the comparison of the two works to flesh out what he terms the place of realism in liberal thought. Realist liberalism has debts to both Hume and Machiavelli, as Whelan makes abundantly clear, and it is as co-contributors to this synthesis of political thought that their philosophical conjunction is finally realized. Whelan's argument here is subtle and persuasive, and his use of the Federalist Papers as exemplars of the "realist liberal tradition" succeeds in providing a tangible example of the convergence of Machiavellian and liberal (or at least Humean liberal) thought. His thesis is not completely novel here, nor does he claim it as such, since the influence of Hume on the founding fathers has been much noted, especially by Garry Wills among others. Nevertheless, the discussion of realist liberalism in the final chapter, as well as the historically captivating survey of "Hume's Princes" in chapter five, serve to finish the book with a theoretical flourish that overcomes the relatively unfulfilled promise of the search in earlier chapters for a "Machiavellian Hume" or a liberal Machiavelli.

The success of the last chapter marks this book as especially useful for political theorists interested in developments in international relations theory within political science. Though the first half of the book engages more issues of interest to philosophers, it often happens that ultimately Machiavelli in his own words or in the study of them turns scholars away from the neatness of analytical philosophical concerns and toward the tumult of everyday politics. This is by no means a failing on Whelan's part to deliver on his goal of discovering the sanguinary connection between Machiavelli and Hume. Rather, it represents the enduring influence of the politics begun by Machiavelli and carried onward (if not completely adopted) by Hume and other liberal thinkers. Each in their own way, both

Hume and Machiavelli call philosophy to task in the appreciation of history and in the service of political order. This book does honor to both men, their ideas, and their shared view of the political world, and carries forward into another century a legacy worth renewing.

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