Maurizio Viroli. *Machiavelli's God*.

Trans. Antony Shugaar. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010. xix + 310 pp. index. $45. ISBN: 978–0–691–12414–8.

In *Machiavelli's God*, Maurizio Viroli challenges interpretations of Machiavelli's religion as either pagan, instrumental, un-Christian, or anti-Christian. The book makes three interconnected arguments: that Machiavelli was a preacher, prophet, and advocate of an early, uncorrupted form of Christianity that prized republican political liberty above all other considerations; that such a form of Christianity was a longstanding Florentine political tradition that both pre- and postdated Machiavelli in Italy; and that the Florentine variety of Christian republicanism resurfaced in Puritan America.

Chapter 1 situates Machiavelli's sense of religion in the larger milieu of Florentine civic religion and provides a survey of various humanists arguing for the compatibility of classical virtue and Christian principles. Chapter 2 discusses the role of rhetoric in Florentine culture and Machiavelli's writings. Chapter 3 surveys

various Renaissance humanists and Machiavelli on the relationship between civic life and republican liberty, stressing the humanist insistence that Christianity was essential for its preservation. The fourth and final chapter looks at invocations of Machiavelli during the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Risorgimento.

Regarding the first argument, Viroli makes indisputably clear that respect for religion was central to Machiavelli's political thought. Chapter 2 shows in detail Machiavelli's recurring argument that meaningful political reform always requires a preexisting culture of flourishing religious belief. And Viroli's discussion of Machiavelli's humanist predecessors shows equally clearly the degree to which many Florentines believed the Christian God to favor active citizenship, political liberty, and republican constitutions.

But Viroli is less persuasive when trying to demonstrate the specifically Christian content of Machiavelli's thinking. He announces in the introduction that the "true Christian God," in Machiavelli's view, was a God "that loves justice, that orders us to love our homeland, and who wants men to be strong so that they can defend that homeland . . . loves . . . the fatherland, the rule of law, living in freedom, and those men who, through their virtue, succeed in creating and preserving these precious and fragile treasures" (1–2). The textual basis for that claim consists of fewer than fifteen lines of Machiavellian text (drawn from *Discourses* 1.12, 2.2, and 1.55, *Florentine Histories* 3.7, and *The Golden Ass*, chapter 5) that receive relatively cursory treatment (roughly ten pages). Of those five passages, the last three can be read at least equally plausibly in ways that run counter to Viroli's argument. Most of Viroli's discussion of religion in Machiavelli's political thought draws from pagan religions, Roman religion, and the Old Testament. The introduction concludes by discussing various Puritan writers on Machiavelli. For Viroli, the fact that many Puritans, for whom there is clear textual evidence of belief in a Christian God of patriotism and war, had things to say about Machiavelli (mostly critical) somehow becomes evidence of that conviction in Machiavelli himself.

At times, Viroli even appears uncertain whether Machiavelli's religion was in fact Christian. He writes "that the Christian God did not occupy the central place in Machiavelli's soul. His own spiritual food . . . was love of country . . . the nourishment that is amply sufficient to emancipate him from human miseries and even fear of death is not God's or Christ's word but a wholly human love that is only similar, not identical, with Christian *caritas*" (xii–xiv). Or consider Viroli's concession that "Machiavelli's references to a God that comforts the afflicted, redeems the oppressed, brings salvation to the innocent, and encourages and acknowledges earthly glory might . . . equally well be signs that he believed in a God who was not all that different from the Christian God, even if God was not that important to him" (43).

The same inconsistency persists in the discussion of the Puritan reading of Machiavelli. According to Viroli, the Puritans "clearly understood what Machiavelli wrote about religion" (11), and the fact of their shared convictions "links the civil religion that flourished in particular in America and the republican Christianity that was born in Florence" (ix). Viroli offers us a few examples of Puritans sympathetic to Machiavelli, such as Henry Neville. However, in spite of Viroli's claim that one

of Neville's key Machiavellian texts is "a truly exemplary document of how an English Puritan interpreted Machiavelli's religious thought" (13), we encounter many more Puritans who rejected or criticized Machiavelli (11–12). To explain away those criticisms, Viroli concludes on the following page that the Puritans did not in fact understand Machiavelli because they were unfamiliar with the *Discourses* and the *Art of War* (12). Viroli goes on to assert that Algernon Sidney "follows in Machiavelli's footsteps in reinforcing the religious content of republicanism," even though Sidney's key religious assertions, Viroli tells us, are nowhere to be found in Machiavelli's writings (16).

There are numerous typographical errors and mistakes in citation. Viroli occasionally misspells author names (Najemi instead of Najemy, Tarkov instead of Tarcov, Blandfield instead of Banfield); has passages in quotations without any source citation (5, 10, 82, 85, 87, 92); a quotation fragment (83); uses Machiavelli's words without quotation marks (176); often cites the English translation of either the *Discourses* or *The Prince* for discussions that do not mention those texts (66, 85, 99, 105, 112, 233); refers to Machiavelli's "direct experience in Palazzo Vecchio" (122) even though the republican Palazzo della Signoria was renamed well after Machiavelli's death; misdates the year of Machiavelli's imprisonment (xiv); and misdates Savonarola's constitutional treatise (158). The frequency of such minor errors hardly lends ballast to the book's more controversial claims.

Machiavelli's God is unlikely to be the final word on the complicated question of Machiavelli's relationship to Christianity. The book does provide, however, an excellent discussion of the role of religion, broadly conceived, in Machiavelli's republican political theory. And — even if the issue remains unclear in Machiavelli's case — Viroli persuasively demonstrates that many key writers in the Florentine tradition leading up to Machiavelli saw Christianity as an indispensable precondition for republican freedom.

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