

# The Private Uprooted: Machiavelli's *Mandragola* and its Moral Implications

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## I. WHAT THE DISPLAY OF THE PRIVATE MAKES POLITICALLY POSSIBLE

For both the ancients and the moderns, philosophy is concerned with an inquiry into the causes of things, the close observance of nature, and the life of virtue guided by prudence. Yet for Plato and Aristotle, nature, prudence, and causality differ dramatically in meaning from the thought of he who scorned “immaginati repubbliche,”<sup>1</sup> namely Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli. As Christopher Lynch notes in his review of Leo Paul de Alvarez’s work *The Machiavellian Enterprise*, the modern search for causes is limited to simply the material and efficient.<sup>2</sup> No longer is nature an intelligible principle of motion and rest; rather it is a dead thing to be conquered. Once nature is redefined, virtue too is measured by a different standard. Accordingly, we may call Machiavelli’s enterprise

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<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Il Principe*. ed. L. Arthur. Burd. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1891, XV.

<sup>2</sup> Lynch, Christopher. “Machiavelli Alone,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2. Spring, Cambridge University Press, 2001. pp. 385-390, 389.

*philosophic* in that it is concerned with “the knowledge of causes,”<sup>3</sup> as de Alvarez makes clear. However, what constitutes sufficient knowledge for Machiavelli departs from any ancient theory of knowing. Machiavelli’s philosophy is ultimately concerned with the particulars of human affairs, not with universals, such is emphatically the case in his play *Mandragola*.

On the one hand, because *Mandragola* primarily focuses on the private rather than the political, it is categorically particular. On the other hand, because *Mandragola* is a work of poetry (as distinct from history), the particularity of its subject matter points to the universal. The tension is drawn out by Leo Strauss in his work, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*: “This supplement to the common good which exists on the same level as the common good, i.e., on a level lower than the truth, is the theme of Machiavelli’s comedy *La Mandragola*.” In his use of the phrase “common good,” Strauss adds the qualification: “in the political sense.”<sup>4</sup> The political common good, for Machiavelli, exists beneath truth—it can be pursued without a view to the *goodness* of things. In addition to the political common good there exists the private good of individual men. It may seem as if the private good has little or no bearing upon the political. But as Machiavelli’s *Mandragola* illustrates, even when the private is pursued regardless of the political good, such actions inevitably have political effects. It is only through the reworking and moral lowering of the political good that Machiavelli succeeds in portraying his character’s pursuit of their private advantage as they simultaneously achieve political peace. The theme of *Mandragola* thereby consists of the pursuit of the private divorced from anything above the political, namely “truth” or the “good.”

The action of Machiavelli’s comic play *Mandragola* centers around a most basic impulse of human nature: eros. While it is Callimaco’s private desire for erotic satisfaction that drives the play, this desire is not sated without having serious political implications. The play therefore deals with private things directly, and political things implicitly. This movement from the private to the public is philosophic in nature. As in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, according to which prudence should

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<sup>3</sup> de Alvarez, *The Machiavellian Enterprise: A Commentary on the Prince*. Northern Illinois University Press. DeKalb, IL, 1999, 139.

<sup>4</sup> Strauss, Leo. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 284.

govern all human action, Machiavelli presents modernity with his own prudential standard. *Mandragola* does not merely portray a series of depraved human behavior; rather it undermines the natural foundations of all societal morality. By undermining and redefining the natural underpinnings of morality, *Mandragola* does not simply demonstrate what *has* been done within a Machiavellian morality, but rather what *can* be done.<sup>5</sup> In illustrating the possible, *Mandragola* proves itself to be a philosophic work. It is only a new way of thinking that can lead to a new way of acting; *Mandragola* illustrates both.

## II. NATURE AND ITS PERSONIFICATION IN THE CHARACTER OF LUCREZIA

What is possible within a Machiavellian morality is far from what is possible with the realm of nature as understood by the ancients. For Machiavelli, as illustrated in various places throughout the *Prince* and especially within the character of Lucrezia in *Mandragola*, nature is no longer an interior principle of motion and rest that directs a thing toward its fulfillment. In the case of man's nature, if it is constant, it is not due to it being teleologically inclined. Rather, it is constant because man is stuck in his cautious ways:

Nor can one find a man so prudent that he would know how to accommodate himself to this; that comes about because he is unable to deviate from that to which nature inclines him, and also because he who has always prospered walking along one way cannot be persuaded to depart from it. And therefore the cautious man, when it is time to be impetuous, does not know how to do it, whence he is ruined; for if he changed his nature with the times and circumstances, fortune would not change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The distinction between what *has* been done and what *can* be done is identified in Aristotle's *Poetics* as that same distinction between history and poetry: ". . . it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability and necessity. . . Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." Aristotle, "Poetics," *Poetics and Rhetoric*. Trans. S.H. Butcher. Barnes and Noble Classics. NY, 2005, XIX.1451a35–1451b8.

<sup>6</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Translated by Leo Paul de Alvarez. Waveland Press, Inc. Long Grove, IL. 1989, Ch. XXV, 148.

The passage may at first glance seem philosophically benign: in order to succeed in difficult times, man must be flexible in his behavior. Yet Machiavelli's vocabulary suggests something subtler, something more challenging to the philosophical tradition. "Non si puo deviare da quello a che la natura l' inclina:"<sup>7</sup> man cannot deviate from the inclinations of nature. For Machiavelli, such deviations are necessary in order to secure one's fortune. Two implications can be inferred here: first, nature is no longer an internal teleological principle within man. Second, whatever it is within man that directs him to act must be something from which he departs. What once was a movement toward flourishing is now a constraint that must be overcome.

In putting forth his new concept of nature, Machiavelli simultaneously puts forth a new conception of morality. Such is implied in the character of Lucrezia. The first description of Lucrezia portrays her as an object that incites a burning desire in Callimaco: "her nature, which is extremely honest and in all ways alien to the things of love, makes war against me."<sup>8</sup> Nature presents a conflict for Callimaco: it makes war against him and it must be overcome. In the process of this overcoming, Callimaco, like the Machiavellian Prince,<sup>9</sup> must come to know the terrain well so as to allow its nature to serve his advantage. Nature can change, but waiting for its favors risks losing an advantageous opportunity. A more certain claim to one's advantage is to work with the nature already manifest—to set up dikes and dams, channeling the river according to one's likings.<sup>10</sup> For a moment, changing Lucrezia's nature presents itself as a possibility in Callimaco's discussion with Siro regarding the visitation of the baths. A simple change in environment, such as the baths, alters the very nature of Lucrezia. Her "nature" is described as "extremely honest and in all ways alien to the things of love."<sup>11</sup> But in visiting the baths, "That place could make her change her nature."<sup>12</sup> However, having her visit the baths could mean another man's advantage, and the disclosure of Callimaco's own character to Messer Nicia (Lucrezia's husband). The

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<sup>7</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Il Principe*. ed. L. Arthur. Burd. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1891, XXV.

<sup>8</sup> Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Mandragola*. Translated by Mera J. Flaumenhaft. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. 198.1.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Prince*, Ch. XIV.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Prince*, XV.

<sup>11</sup> *Mandragola*, 1.1, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Mandragola*, 1.1, 15.

change in Lucrezia's nature will not be according to the natural undulation of fortune. Rather, it will be on Callimaco's terms. It will be forced, though subtly, like the dams and dikes of a river.

### III. CALLIMACO'S "PRUDENCE" AND NICIA'S HESITATION

Just as the prince observes the nature of the land so as to plot his territory, Callimaco observes his circumstance and weighs his reasons for hope against his reasons for despair. His hope is contingent upon the weaknesses of the parties involved: Messer Nicia is a doctor, but also a simpleton, the couple longs for children, Lucrezia's mother is of "good company" or "easy virtue," which is to say, of weak morality. Moreover, Messer Nicia's stupidity does not safeguard against depravity. In the scene of Nicia's first appearance, Ligurio accuses the *dottore* for being timid in "losing sight of the cupola" (referencing a church dome), an accusation that Nicia speedily denies as if out of embarrassment.<sup>13</sup> It does not take very long to discover that Nicia's blindness to the church dome manifests itself in a blindness to Christian morality. Initially he resists Ligurio and Callimaco's scheme because he does not want to be made a "cuckold," to which Callimaco responds: "What are you saying, Dottore? Oh, I don't have in you as wise a man as I believed. So you fear to do what the king of France, and as many lords as are there, have done?"<sup>14</sup> The toggle between fear and courage evokes images from another politically driven Renaissance playwright: Shakespeare. Lady Macbeth mocks her husband's hesitation in committing a "simple" act of regicide. By "Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'"<sup>15</sup> Macbeth receives the accusation of "coward." He is like the adage of the cat, who hesitates to the points of failure in catching a fish because he does not want to wet his paws. Callimaco challenges Nicia with the lessons of this same adage. Callimaco and Nicia both desire an end that requires the wetting of paws. While Callimaco is, as he claims, "not afraid of anything, but will take any course—bestial, cruel, nefarious,"<sup>16</sup> Nicia is more hesitant.

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<sup>13</sup> *Mandragola*, 1.1, 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Mandragola*, 2.6, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. Simon & Schuster. Washington DC: 2003, 1.7.

<sup>16</sup> *Mandragola*, 1.3, 17.

However, Callimaco is not wholly released from the torments of his conscience. Like Lady Macbeth who shames her husband's moral hesitation, Callimaco taunts himself:

On the other side, the worst that can come to you from it is to die and go to hell; but how many others are dead! And there are so many good men in hell! Are you ashamed to go there? Face your lot; flee evil, but, not being able to flee it bear it like a man; don't prostrate yourself, don't degrade yourself like a woman.<sup>17</sup>

To be a man is to be willing to do anything in order to achieve the desired end. Silencing the passions of the heart, no matter how wicked, is to become disfigured. As Lady Macbeth is to her husband, so is Callimaco's lesser self is to his better self.<sup>18</sup> The standard of manliness is put into question: unless one is willing to cut even those most natural bonds between mother and child, manliness, courage, and virtue are not present.

Nicia's initial objection to the entire mandrake scheme was that he did not want his wife to be made a whore, nor he to be made a cuckold. His response follows the disclosure of Callimaco's plot: the first man who sleeps with Lucrezia after she has taken the Mandrake potion will die within eight days. Nicia's initial moral qualm concerns his social status, not the taking of innocent life. Like Siro, he does not want "to end up in trouble" with the Florentine criminal tribunal. Yet Callimaco dispels even this reputational hesitation. Nicia complies, but only because "the king and princes and lords have taken this way."<sup>19</sup> Within the structure of *Mandragola*, morality is derived from princes. What this implies within a Machiavellian morality is portrayed as early as the Dedicatory Letter of the *Prince*:

...for, just as those who sketch the countryside place themselves below in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places, and in order to consider the low places they put themselves high on the

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<sup>17</sup> *Mandragola*, 4.1, 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Macbeth* 1.7: Lady Macbeth challenges her husband, claiming that if she were to have made such an oath, she would be willing to dash the brains of her own suckling child, ripping him from her own bosom: "I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums, And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you / Have done to this." Shakespeare. *Macbeth*. Simon & Schuster. Washington DC. 2003.

<sup>19</sup> *Mandragola*, 2.6, 26.

mountains, similarly, to come to know well the nature of the people one needs to be a prince and to know well that of princes one needs to be of the people.<sup>20</sup>

Princes, in order to know the ways of men must come down to the people, and the people, if they are to be men of *virtu*, must comply with the newly defined morality of lowly princes. Nicia conforms to such lowered standards of morality. He fears criminality and slander, but his desire for an heir is stronger than this fear. Callimaco gives Nicia new fears that outdo the rest: the fear of cowardice in securing one's desires no matter the cost. This is Callimaco's own methodology toward himself, and he now prescribes it to Nicia, the *dottore*.

#### IV. LADY FORTUNA

After Nicia's decision, Callimaco offers an affirmation hinting at the necessity to subdue Lady Fortuna: "I wouldn't want to be a husband if I couldn't dispose my wife to do things my way."<sup>21</sup> The affirmation is reminiscent of Machiavelli's own dictates toward fortune:

I conclude, then, that with fortune varying, and men standing obstinate in their modes, when these are in concord with each other, men are happy; and when these are in discord, unhappy. I am very much of this judgment: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and if one wishes to keep her down, it is necessary to beat her and knock her down.<sup>22</sup>

Fortune undulates, and in order to eliminate chance, a prince's morality must undulate according to fortune. Machiavelli's notion of *necessity* emerges when fortune poses a threat; morality is governed by what is *necessary* in procuring one's advantage especially under the threat of misfortune. The conquering of fortune is intimated as early as the second stanza of the opening Prologue. The audience is introduced to Nicia, the *dottore*, "who learned in Buethius a great deal of law."<sup>23</sup> As indicated in a footnote by Mera J. Flaumenhaft, "Machiavelli misspells Boethius. The

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<sup>20</sup> *Prince*, Epistle Dedicatory 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Mandragola*, 2.6, 26.

<sup>22</sup> *Prince*, Ch. XXV.

<sup>23</sup> *Mandragola*, Prologue, 9.

changed first letters spell *bue*, the Italian word for ‘ox.’”<sup>24</sup> In his *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius sits at the feet of Lady Philosophy and learns from her the patterns of the stars, the wisdom of poetry, and most importantly in regard to Machiavelli, the ways of fortune. Having been the target of ample misfortune, Boethius seeks the guidance of Lady Philosophy in how to conduct his life according to wisdom. The only constant in fortune is her inconstancy. Unlike Machiavelli, who advocates an undulating morality according to the undulation of fortune, Lady Philosophy demands a consistent morality, one that is in accord with man’s rational and divine nature. Boethius, with his popularization of the “wheel of fortune,” represents the ancient attitude toward suffering and misfortune—an attitude that is fixed upon the good, despite fortune’s capriciousness. The *dottore*, Nicia, who was once learned in the ancient approach to fortune, will now be taught by Callimaco’s wheel of fortune. No longer will Nicia respond to fortune according to the dictates of a stable morality aimed at man’s perfection. Fortune will be beat, held down, and conquered.

## V. CHRISTIANITY AND A DOGMATIC MORALITY

In this breakdown of societal morality, Callimaco and Ligurio must begin with the most dominant proponent of such moral structures: Christianity. From the outset Nicia’s religiosity is regularly taken advantage of. His piety is a mere façade as indicated but such exclamations as, “Oh oh, Saint Puccio’s pussy!”<sup>25</sup> The remark is made after Callimaco pretentiously rattles something off in Latin. The pretense of Callimaco is not simply aimed at convincing Nicia of Callimaco’s intellectual authority, but is also meant to replace central figures of authority. Such is implied by the shift in Nicia’s belief: “I believe in you [Callimaco] more than in my confessor.”<sup>26</sup> For Lucrezia, the replacement of authority is not so easily accomplished. It is clear from the outset that Lucrezia is a woman of belief, as is her mother, Sostrata. As Harvey Mansfield points out in his article, “The Cuckold in Machiavelli’s *Mandragola*,” Sostrata’s very first words in the play are overwhelmingly dogmatic: “I believe that you believe.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Mandragola*, 2.6, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 2.6, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 3.11, 35.



This conversation between Sostrata and Lucrezia forms what Mansfield argues is “the central scene of *Mandragola*.”<sup>28</sup> It is through Sostrata’s “easy company” that Lucrezia agrees to speaking with Frate Timoteo. The name *Sostrata* combines a Latin form of the Greek name, Σωστράτη (Sostrate)—σως (sos), meaning “safe, unwounded,” with στρατος (stratos), meaning “army.” Sostrata, quite literally then is the personification of Machiavellian prudence: *strategic* warfare. Such is indicated by her brief interactions with her daughter in the play:

I’ve always heard it said that it’s the duty of a prudent person to take the best among bad courses. If to have children, you have no other remedy, then you’ll want to take this one, if it doesn’t weigh upon the conscience.<sup>29</sup>

Machiavellian prudence is the mere *strategic* reduction of choosing the most advantageous option, despite what might be deemed morally superior.

Lucrezia’s opening line similarly reveals her dogmatic morality. She begins, “I’ve always feared.”<sup>30</sup> Lucrezia is motivated by passion and belief—both of which are contingent upon substitutable objects. Lucrezia’s passion, namely her fear of committing some “error,” is substituted with a fear of not ever having an heir. Her belief in conventional Christian morality is substituted for a belief in the sole authority of Frate Timoteo, so long as the laying with a man (other than her husband) is “allowed” to her:<sup>31</sup>

I’ve always feared that Messer Nicia’s longing to have children would make us commit some error. . . . But of all the things that have been attempted, this seems to me the most strange: to have to submit my body to this disgrace, to be the cause that a man might die for disgracing me; because if I were the only woman remaining in the world and if human

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<sup>28</sup> Mansfield, Harvey. “The Cuckold in Machiavelli’s *Mandragola*.” *The Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli*. Ed. Vickie B. Sullivan, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Mandragola*, 3.1, 28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 3,9 34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 3,9, 35.

nature had to rise again from me, I couldn't believe that such a course would be allowed to me.<sup>32</sup>

The Machiavellian oscillation between extremes manifests itself in Lucrezia's proclamation that if she were to be the fountain from which human nature itself springs, she would not commit this course of action. Here, Lucrezia speaks both literally and symbolically. "Human nature," in the literal sense, indicates the continuation of the species. Symbolically, however, "human nature" can also be understood to mean the course of human moral action. But even then, Lucrezia pronounces, even if she were held solely responsible for the continuation of the human race, such circumstances would not change her position. Yet, conversely, if only mere "allowance" would be granted to her, her nature may change. This language of permission is quite revealing of Lucrezia's character. Lucrezia fears committing some "error," inferring not "sin," but "mistake." She is willing to go to extremes, Mansfield continues, so long as she could "believe that such a course would be allowed."<sup>33</sup> Lucrezia's "fear arises from her belief and from her need to believe that what she does is permitted. These are weaknesses that will be used against her."<sup>34</sup> Lucrezia's suspicion toward her husband is yet another manifestation of the necessary subversion of even the most natural bonds of men. While Lucrezia eventually adheres to Frate Timoteo's mandrake recommendation, she later regards his character as "wicked."<sup>35</sup> Toward the very end, Lucrezia manifests an extreme dogmatism, so much so that it takes on the appearance of conventionalism. There is no eternal standard—what is deemed moral is what chance itself has arranged:

Since your astuteness, my husband's stupidity, my mother's simplicity, and my confessor's wickedness have led me to do what I never would have done by myself, I'm determined to judge that it comes from a heavenly disposition which has so willed; and I don't have it in me to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 3.9, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.9, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragol*," 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Mandragola*, 5.3, 52.

reject what Heaven wills me to accept...what my husband wanted for one evening, I want him to have always.<sup>36</sup>

While Lucrezia employs Heaven's "disposition" as justification for her behavior, her previously expressed belief in heaven's volatility renders this statement a declaration of conventionalism. Lucrezia's moral compass is wholly contingent upon external and ever-changing factors. Moreover, Lucrezia's description of the arrangement of the varying characters and dispositions produces an exceptionally rare situation. This is the great Machiavellian shift in morality: unlike the ancients who looked to what occurs "always or for the most part," Machiavelli puts forth a morality based on the "exception." Lucrezia details the rarity of the situation, and makes this one-night-exception the norm "always."

## VI. PRIVATE RELATIONS UNDONE

Relations of the private are completely undermined, such as those between: husband and wife, mother and daughter, and as the end of the play intimates, the relation between Callimaco as biological father to Nicia's future heir. Lucrezia is at the heart of each of these ruptures. Yet, the ruptured natural bonds of *Mandragola* do not exhaust all the Machiavellian possibilities. They do, however, implicitly open the door to all possibilities. As portrayed in that early conversation between Ligurio and Frate Timoteo, while the killing of an unborn child is not carried out, Frate Timoteo is *willing* to carry it out:

LIGURIO: A year ago, this man went to France...he left his one marriageable daughter in the care of a convent...It followed that, either through the carelessness of the nuns, or the brainlessness of the girl, she finds herself four months pregnant; so that if the situation's not repaired with prudence, the Dottore, the nuns, the girl, Cammillo, and the house of Calfucci will be disgraced...only you and the abbess can remedy this.

TIMOTEO: How?

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 5.4, 52-53. These are Lucrezia's words through Callimaco's retelling.

LIGURIO: By persuading the abbess to give a potion to make her miscarry.<sup>37</sup>

The situation is to be repaired with “prudence.” The child is to be aborted, in order that the appearance of virtue is maintained. Once the Frate agrees to provide the abbess with the potion, Ligurio quickly pretends to have heard news from a nearby woman “that the girl has miscarried all by herself.”<sup>38</sup> Of course, as becomes evident to the Frate, this story is completely fabricated. After informing the Frate of the “miscarriage,” Ligurio then asks if Timoteo would be willing to go along with another favor—to do “something less burdensome, less scandalous, more agreeable to us, more profitable to you.”<sup>39</sup> If the Frate would agree to supporting an abortion, then he would surely agree to supporting an affair—especially when the affair proves politically beneficial to all parties involved.

## VII. THE IMPLICATIONS OF A MACHIAVELLIAN MORALITY

By considering the shift from abortion to adultery as a movement from extraordinary crime to ordinary crime, Machiavelli’s new morality is, I would argue, clarified. Within a Machiavellian morality, the most wicked act is not always the most advantageous. Machiavelli’s morality is not a recipe for sheer bestiality. A man may in fact be conventionally civilized and moderate within Machiavelli’s new system. What is crucial is that such a man is always *willing* to perform an abortion; or as Callimaco phrases it, “[I] will take any course—bestial, cruel, nefarious.”<sup>40</sup> Such willingness does not necessitate the actual occurrence of evil. That is to say, the guiding principle of Machiavellianism is not depravity, but rather utility. Frate Timoteo suggests this much in his soliloquy during Act Four:

... and many times one comes too hard by being too easy-going and too good, as well as by being too wicked. God knows I didn’t intend to injure anybody; I stayed in my cell, I said my office.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 3.4, 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 3.4, 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 3.7, 33.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 1.3, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 4.6, 44.

Machiavellian morality is not entirely depraved: one does not want to appear to be too wicked, nor have wickedness as one's end. Similarly, one must avoid being "too good."<sup>42</sup> For Machiavelli, prudence is not a guiding principle that governs actions according to right-reason. Rather, prudence is advantageous management. As Ligurio notes to Nicia, "With how much prudence you've managed this thing!"<sup>43</sup> To manage, as the Italian suggests, is to govern—*governato*—to dominate.

Machiavelli sets up a morality that counteracts fortune as it manifests itself both in nature and in the actions of men. He supposes that the virtue of men cannot be trusted; it is safer to be "feared than loved, if you cannot be both." Through a morality of necessity, the common good is achieved indirectly. *Mandragola* is truly comedic in the sense that everyone comes out on top. The political good is achieved through the private ambition of individuals. Even under the appearance of peace, a subtle war-like struggle is always present.<sup>44</sup> Callimaco hopes because the moral standards have been lowered, and his success is wholly contingent upon the weakness and passion of others. By making the aim of the regime a mere continuation of the aim of the private, *Mandragola* obliterates the protection of "one's own."<sup>45</sup>

### VIII. CONCLUSION

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<sup>42</sup> Mansfield observes a similar Machiavellian moderation: "Machiavelli presents the case for freer sex in the *Mandragola* but emphatically not for a sexual revolution, in the current sense, that would overthrow all hypocritical notions of fidelity and shame. That is the meaning of the comic domestication of adultery in the play." Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Mandragola*, 5.2, 51.

<sup>44</sup> As Strauss notes in *Natural Right and History*, Machiavelli achieves his political end because he lowers the political standard. Cf. Strauss, Leo. Strauss, Leo. *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 178.

<sup>45</sup> According to Machiavelli, comedy has for its end enjoyment through the display of the private: "For though the aim of a comedy is to hold up a mirror to domestic life, the way it does this, all the same, is with a certain urbanity and with expressions which excite laughter, so that the men who come eagerly to enjoy themselves, taste afterward the useful lesson that lay underneath. This is why it is difficult to use serious characters; for there can be no gravity in a cheating servant, a ridiculous old man, in a love-crazed youth, in a wheedling harlot, in a greedy parasite, yet their actions can convey various lessons, useful to our daily life." Machiavelli, Niccolò. "A Dialogue on Language." *The Literary Works of Machiavelli*. ed. and trans. J. R. Hale, Greenwood Press. Westport, CT. 1979, 188.

Fortune will only sometimes favor one's advantage; the virtue of men cannot be trusted. At the junction of fortune and man's ambition lies advantage and it is by way of necessity that one obtains it. Machiavelli's *Mandragola* displays this advantage. Its comedic drama lies in the exceptional probability of its successful outcome—for all parties involved. The political order is maintained, Nicia will have an heir—but at what cost? The most natural bonds between father and son, husband and wife, mother and daughter, have all been torn asunder. How long can a political order be maintained when the branch on which it sits has been cut down? *Mandragola* attempts to dispel the distinction—there is no branch of the private, there is simply the political. Morality functions on an understanding of a malleable nature, an undulating fortune, and a prudence that seeks to subdue. Love requires obligation and risks betrayal. But fear is constant and safe. Cast out love, and like Lady Macbeth, you cast the suckling child against the rocks. Machiavelli has inquired into the causes of things: fortune, fear, and ambition. With personal advantage as the aim of human affairs, only one constant can be inferred: to do whatever is necessary.