

Kim A. Sorensen, *Discourses on Strauss: Revelation and Reason in Leo Strauss and His Critical Study of Machiavelli* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). xvi + 266 pp., \$?? ISBN 9780268041175.

In *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Leo Strauss observes, 'Books like the *Discourses* and the *Prince* do not reveal their full meaning as intended by the author unless one ponders over them "day and night" for a long time'. He then continues, 'It is fortunate for the historians of ideas, to say nothing of others, that there are not many books of this kind' (p. 174). Is *Thoughts on Machiavelli* one of these books? Did Strauss 'write as he read'? Recent scholarship on Strauss has shown the extent to which he took great care in formulating his thoughts (see, for example, Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche*; and Nasser Behnegar, *Leo Strauss, Max Weber, and the Scientific Study of Politics*). In *Discourses on Strauss* Sorensen examines in detail the concluding chapter IV of Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 'Machiavelli's Teaching', to gain greater insights into his views on the nature of relationship between reason and revelation. The tension between reason and revelation, or the choice between Jerusalem and Athens, warrants examination because Strauss himself regards it as one of the defining aspects of Western political philosophy. It has been the focus of recent Strauss commentary (see, for example, Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*).

*Discourses on Strauss* is in three parts: the first locates Strauss, and the problem of revelation and reason in contemporary thought (pp 17-56); the second examines Strauss's Machiavelli on religion (pp 57-98); and the final third part looks at Strauss's Machiavelli on philosophy (pp 99-166). *Discourses on Strauss* has considerable merits. The author's seriousness is evident in his close and careful reading of, not only Strauss, and Machiavelli, but an impressive range of secondary scholarship, ranging from classical sources such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, to the ever expanding commentary on Strauss, to contemporary debates regarding humanism and civic republicanism. Sorensen is especially helpful in his discussion of Strauss's subtle posing of the question of revelation and reason, revealing the depth of the problem that cannot be simply overcome by an unthinking piety or dogmatic atheism. But the core question, that for Strauss Machiavelli was 'neither pagan nor Christian', though comprehensively formulated, remains insufficiently resolved in the book. If Machiavelli relies on Averroës' arguments to repudiate biblical piety, why does he not return to the 'pagans', Plato and Aristotle? (see especially pp. 59; 73-80). Machiavelli seems more hopeful than Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, it seems that this new hope and ambition is the foundation of modernity – recall Machiavelli presents himself in the *Discourses* as one who has taken 'a path as yet untrodden by anyone'; a discoverer of new continents. But what is the character of this new ambition? Is it truly new, or in fact an admixture of both classical and Christian, a 'secularized' piety – what I would call, a 'modern piety'? (see, for example, p. 163). This question is clearly important not only for Strauss's understanding of revelation and reason, but also for his conception of modernity and therefore his attempt to recover Platonic political philosophy.

*Discourses on Strauss* is a valuable addition to the Strauss scholarship, and importantly, to the study of a profound question that modernity optimistically considered resolved – the challenge of divine politics.