

Machiavellianism Ethics and Political Thought

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The End and the Means in Machiavellian Ethics

The end justifies the means a winged phrase often attributed to the authorship of the Italian writer and politician Machiavelli since he expressed thoughts similar to the idea “the end justifies the means” in his work “The Prince” (1532). But, according to other sources, this quote could have belonged to Ignatius de Loyola. In fact, the issue is controversial, and the final verdict has not been passed. For example, the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Winged Words and Expressions states that:

Traditionally, it is believed that these words belong to the famous Italian thinker, historian, and statesman Machiavelli (1469-1527), the author of the well-known treatises “The Prince” and “Discourse on the First Decade of Titus Livius.” But this is a mistake in the creative heritage of this outstanding political analyst of the Middle Ages; there is no such expression. In fact, this saying belongs to the Jesuit Escobar and is the motto of the Jesuit Order and, accordingly, the basis of their morality.

Some of his works survived many publications and were translated into different languages. In them, Escobar tried to justify the Jesuits’ casuistic morality and did not hesitate to distort passages from the Holy Scriptures and the fathers of the church. He frankly expressed and developed the idea that the purity of intentions justifies actions that are condemned by morality and laws. The famous “Provincial Letters” of Pascal are dedicated to him, Escobar.

Religious Casuistry and the Historical Critique of Expediency

Even the popes were forced to condemn some of Escobar’s provisions, and the Jesuits officially refused to support his views, whereas before, he played the role of the leading theorist of their morality. The teachings of Escobar were subjected to merciless derision from Moliere, Boileau, and Lafontaine. From his name was even formed the word *escobarderie*, denoting, according to the dictionary of the French Academy, hypocrisy, with which a person resolves difficult questions of conscience in a sense favorable to his benefits.

So, given the chronology, the author of the “invention” is obviously still worth considering Machiavelli, but the “patent for the invention” is accurately registered by the Jesuits. However, the “Sovereign”

Machiavelli, from where these lines were taken (and later became the “reference book” of the ideologists of fascism and communism) was presented by the author as a gift to the reigning family of the Medici, who, as is well known, widely applied this principle without its theoretical justification. So, to find out who first pronounced this phrase – Machiavelli or Lorenzo de’ Medici – is hardly possible. He was often cursed and condemned, called an immoral cynic and author of “instructions for bandits” (a characteristic of Bertrand Russell). But in fact, the moral position and views of Machiavelli were much more complicated. Its central assertion is that politicians have their moral logic, sometimes requiring such actions for the sake of preserving the state, which a refined and decent society can deem reprehensible. In other words, there are times when traditional morality needs to be put aside for the sake of pragmatic and expedient state interests.

The exceptionally modern and bold “Sovereign” does what this treatise “undermines the universal conventions of his [Machiavelli] of time, whether it is presented as a difference between morality and politics or as a difference between two different, but equally primitive forms of morality.” It was a strikingly abrupt work in its secularity for the beginning of the 16th century. Of course, the Catholic Church became more vulnerable with the strengthening and exaltation of influential states that competed in the struggle for power, and with widespread discontent with papal corruption. Four years later Martin Luther wrote his “95 Theses on Indulgences” and posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, initiating the Reformation and the split of Western Christianity. Nevertheless, it is striking in the “Prince” that there is no mention of the natural law or the place of a person in the great divine chain of the universe, which was constantly referred to by thinkers from the Renaissance.

Machiavelli’s Political Realism and the Logic of Power

Although Machiavelli is considered an influential political theorist, he does not have much written work. This is mainly “Sovereign” and “Reasoning.” Unlike later realists, such as Hobbes and Rousseau, Machiavelli does not claim to be the author of the system theory of politics. Rather, based on his historical research and practical observations, he tries to establish timeless truths of a person’s social behavior, and then transform them into a set of maxims, aphorisms, and prescriptions that can help the sovereign survive in our treacherous and unreliable world. He explores the rich history of classical [Ancient Greece](#) and Rome, as well as later perturbations in Italian city-states, looking for examples of successful and failed political rule.

The motive for writing this treatise on Machiavelli was not only the desire to instruct the readers but also his political rehabilitation. Trying to win over the location of the new ruler of Florence, he dedicated the “Sovereign” to the “brilliant Lorenzo de’ Medici,” who, with the help of Spanish troops, overthrew his previous patron, Soderini a year earlier. However, the “Sovereign” cannot be dismissed, calling the model of political opportunism. Machiavelli was a patriot of Florence and wrote: “I love my country more than my soul.” And in his book, there is always desperation from her fall. The goal of

Machiavelli was to find the reasons for the recent misfortunes and failures of his city-state. Having established the fundamental realities and fundamental rules of politics, he believed that he would be able to help in the creation of a state-the best republic, that would be internally stable and able to protect itself from external aggression.

His goal was to resurrect Florence, bring it out of an immoral and weakened state, turning the city into a “strong, united, active, morally regenerated, brilliant and victorious Patria” (homeland) in the image and likeness of Pericles Athens and the Roman Republic. For the return to the Florentine state of the former glory, a sovereign was needed, possessing and inculcating pre-Christian qualities to his subjects, appreciated by the great people of antiquity: strength, skill, courage, devotion, civicism, and concern for the public interest. At the same time, measures that were usually considered ruthless, treacherous, cruel, and barbarous were required to get rid of Florence from its troubles and misfortunes.

Human Nature, Statecraft, and the Moral Limits of Political Action

In the dark basis of the “Sovereign” lies a ruthless and devoid of any sentimentality of opinion about human nature. Most people write Machiavelli, “are ungrateful and impermanent, inclined to hypocrisy and deceit, they are frightened away by danger and attracted to profit.” In such a world, a ruler who behaves according to Christian morality will have to be very ill. “The distance between how people live and how they should live is so great that one who rejects the real for the sake of what is due acts more to harm himself than for good.” Machiavelli then explains his idea: “It follows that the sovereign if he wants to retain power, must acquire the ability to retreat from good and use this skill, if necessary.”

Machiavelli remembers that the private and public worlds have different moral universes, which have incompatible codes of conduct. Having elected the life of a statesman, not an individual, the ruler undertakes to act (and be judged) on a separate set of pre-Christian values and principles aimed at creating and securing the “great and glorious state.”

Machiavelli explores the relationship between the material forces and the mediation of man through the concepts of fortune and virtue (fate and valor). All sovereigns (and, of course, all people) are subject to social and natural factors, which are much stronger than them. Nevertheless, “we can not be deprived of free will,” says Machiavelli. “Fate controls only half of all our affairs, the other half, or so, it provides to the people themselves.” Although fate can be capricious, and conditions limit history, a skilled ruler can form his destiny and the destiny of his state, showing valor. Valor should not be confused with virtue, as defined by Christian doctrine (bearing in mind honesty, mercy, humility, and the like). Rather, valor means those human qualities that were valued in classical antiquity: knowledge and courage, cunning and dexterity, pride and strength.

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