

Machiavelli's view of human nature and religion



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Machiavelli had discussed this in the beginning of 'The Prince' about the human nature. Machiavelli had assumed and had given the human nature a dark picture to an extreme that some think that he had considered humans to that of animals. According to Machiavelli human nature is completely selfish and full of ego and that they always think about their own self interest like the masses desire safety and security and the ruler wants power, and that they are very selfish to gain and conquer their motives. Machiavelli has described humans as bad, evil, selfish, egoistic and depraved. Human wants has no particular limit, they are greedy, sensual creature, mean, bad and depraved and he even goes on to saying that a human being only cares for himself, their family and their property and to conquer this they are ready to do anything even to the extent of forgiving their enemy, he even says that in order to safeguard their priorities they can even forgive the murder of their father or any kin for that matter than the seizure of his property or any harm to himself. Humans love themselves first and then think about other things and that they are not law abiding citizens. As long as the ruler is providing them the safety and the security that they desire that is the safety and security of them, their family and that of their property they are sated and to also protect from any foreign invaders, and if the ruler is able to do this the masses are easy to rule and the state is well governed. According to Machiavelli humans use the state and the government for their own selfish reason, profit and protection, they immediately start disliking or hating the thing that they can't achieve or is difficult to achieve or is out of their reach and will deliberately tend to avoid or delay it. Machiavelli also says that human by nature are wicked and aggressive, in the words of Sabine, "Human nature is moreover, profoundly aggressive and acquisitive, men aim

to keep what they have and to acquire more. Neither in power nor in possessions are always in fact limited by natural scarcity. Accordingly men are always in a condition of strife and competition which threatens an open anarchy unless checked by the ruthless forces of the state.”

Machiavelli believes that human beings are insatiable and mean by nature. Humans are insatiable but full of desires. His view regarding human nature is that of an high resemblance to that of Hobbes. Machiavelli's views regarding politics, religion and morality are essentially based on his view of human nature.

Machiavelli says that, “ Men are ungrateful, fickle, deceitful, cowardly and avaricious.” From this it sums up to the conclusion that a ruler or a monarch should aim rather to be feared than to be loved. Machiavelli says that a ruler should protect the people, their families and their properties and he can rule over them without any hassle. Machiavelli quotes, “ Men love at their pleasure, but fear at the pleasure of the prince, who should therefore depend upon that which in his own, not upon that which is of others. Yet he may be feared without being hated if he refrains from touching their property and their woman kind of his subjects, and if he avoid bloodshed excepting when there is good cause and manifest justification for it is in as much as men more easily forget the loss of their father than of their property.” With it he tends to say that man so much is in love with his priorities that he can go to any extreme and even turn evil to protect it from danger, Machiavelli here also mentions that apart from property men is also insecure of his women and that if anyone is eyeing their women they tend to be aggressive and

then it comes up to their ego, this idea or thought of Machiavelli can be seen even today.

Machiavelli's view and point of human nature was very materialistic, he had rejected and turned down the ideologies of the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato who said that the state aims to make the people virtuous and good, he also dismisses the idea that existed in the medieval ages that the end of the state is to smooth the way of a man to eternal salvation.

Machiavelli as always was highly criticized for this but according to him, "The end of the state is material prosperity."

CRITICISM OF MACHIAVELLI'S IDEA OF HUMAN NATURE

Machiavelli's concept of human nature is highly criticized by many till today, by various people and on various grounds. Some of them being:

- Man by nature has some virtues and is not purely selfish.
- His concept of human nature does not take into consideration the universal society. His views and ideas regarding human nature are the pure result of the observations he made and the conditions that prevailed at that particular time in Italy. According to the quote given by Sabine, "Machiavelli is not so much concerned with badness or egoism as a general human motive and with its prevalence in Italy as a symptom of social decadence. To him, Italy stands as an example of corrupt society." So here the criticism is that Machiavelli has given the concept of human nature as at his time Italy's political position was unbalanced and he had observed and wrote according to that and that his concept might be limited and not universal.

- According to Machiavelli's concept of human nature man is an animal who is bad and depraved and that he cannot be reformed by any method. But he is here criticized with accordance to Plato and Aristotle who have said that throughout with the means of proper education man can be reformed.
- Machiavelli's saying that men is ready to sacrifice their kin or relations for the sake and security of his priorities, but Machiavelli here also says that the top three priorities of man are life, family and then property, so how can he give up one priority to meet the other. No doubt that people love their property but they love and have equally deep regard and affection for their family, kin's and other relations of blood.

According to all this and keeping in mind the critics it can be said that on the basis of the above give criticism and discussion Machiavelli cannot be said as completely right, to some he might be, he and his ideas might be excellent to some but others may oppose it and it might not be according to their liking and ideology. But Machiavelli does not create an illusion he speaks and thinks practical and rational and reflects reality and most of his views are prevalent and can be seen in the present or current day scenario, as in today's life we too observed and think that people have become selfish and that they think mostly about themselves, a lot of examples can be given from our own personal life and what we observe of that of others.

MACHIAVELLI'S VIEW ON RELIGION

Before Machiavelli, almost all thinkers and political personalities believed and propagated and promoted religion as the basis of the state. Plato considered state as the sole priority and religion to be a moral and an

integrated part of the state. Aristotle too believed that religion was a factor and the basis for the proper administration of a good and excellent working state, but Machiavelli as being different did too believed in religion but his idea and the use of religion was totally and intelligently different, he made religion as the way as a basis for the advancement and the betterment of the state.

Throughout the middle ages it was the church was the dominant and the supreme and the major part of the state and the church had political power and ruled the state and the pope of the church had supreme authority even in the sway of politics, as god was feared and the church was the creation of the god so the popes or the father were given and was considered as a dominant authority over the state of affairs to that of the state as that the soul has the supreme authority over the body, it was during that time that it was assumes that the church has a superior authority and position as compare, but Machiavelli was opposed to this idea as he thought of it differently and with this and his intellectual thoughts he believed and promoted religion but with his own twist of idea. It was Machiavelli and his idea that there should be a separation of religion from politics; it was Machiavelli who divorced religion from politics and segregated them completely from one another like his separation of ethics and moral from politics. He believed that politics attached to something is not real politics and that it should be played or governed on one on one basis.

Machiavelli, he gave less importance to religion as compared to the state. The state according to Machiavelli has no important relation to the church but it also has no relation to God or any other super natural power for the

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matter of fact, he says that the state needs religion only as an instrumental object for furthering its own object. According to Allen, “ In Machiavelli’s views the state can be understood only in terms of human lusts and appetites and that the successful ruler must learn to control these forms.”

As he gave less importance to religion, he at the very same time stated and accepted that morality has a limited place in the society and that they should and must be both exploited and preserved. He thus was unmoral and not immoral.

Machiavelli thought that religious factor in the society is a driving force which a clever and intellectual ruler can use to turn the table in the game of politics and use religion for their own advantage and growth of the state. For him the ruler should be an intelligent to use religion in such a way that the masses are happy and so that it is for the better administration of the state. For this he promoted religion but keeping his own interest and thought in mind. He was even considered as a person who is against religion and one who does not believes and because of this he was disliked and opposed many a times. But he always made his thinking and perception of religion clear, According to Machiavelli religion is a guiding principle which prevents you from doing or committing anything wrong, religion makes a person righteous makes them fearful and more law abiding, it is usually seen that a religious person is a god fearing person and because of this fear he is more into religion, the more he is into religion the more he will go according to the religious teachings and as all the religion teaches good to a person and that they should be just and moral so the more he is morally developed and the more he is morally developed he will think before doing anything wrong and <https://assignbuster.com/machiavellis-view-of-human-nature-and-religion/>

it will lead to less wrong doings which also mean less crimes and law breaking, the lesser the crime the administration would work smoothly and which in turn hails and makes the state more powerful, so Machiavelli did believe in religion but with a but he added his own sense of twist there for the betterment of the state. He on one hand encouraged people to be more and more religious and on the other hand he also set certain strategies for the ruler to assume and pretend to be merciful, god fearing, righteous, religious and powerful but when it comes to the state the ruler can and should go to any extremes for the sake and the security of the state even if he has to be or is considered to be immoral. Thus the ruler in order to rule should be highly pretentious and if he pretends to the masses then they would be easy to rule conditioned that the ruler should protect their initial priorities regarding safety and security of them their family and their property.

Machiavelli's separation of religion is an outstanding idea and the way he uses religion for the advancement of the society and the betterment of the administration is absolutely commendable. His idea of the ruler as a pretender is so relevant even in today's time, as politicians and other influential personalities even though highly corrupted and evil from within tend to make a clear and a white impression to and in front of the masses and hoax them in order to increase their vote banks or to gain their benefit and profit. So what Machiavelli had thought and perceived about this centuries ago is still very much there and prevails in the present context.

Thus Machiavelli thought about religion as a powerful instrument so far that it is in the hands of the wise ruler to sustain and uphold the national morale of the state.