

A comparison of machiaVELLI and hobbes politics essay



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Machiavelli and Hobbes were the most important political philosophers of early modernity. Politically, modernity's earliest phase starts with Niccoló Machiavelli's works which openly rejected the medieval and Aristotelian style of analyzing politics by comparison ideas about how things should be, in favor of realistic analysis of how things really are. He also proposed that an aim of politics is to control one's own chance or fortune, and that relying upon providence actually leads to evil. Machiavelli argued, for example, that violent divisions within political communities are unavoidable, but can also be a source of strength which law-makers and leaders should account for and even encourage in some ways.[1]

Machiavelli's recommendations were sometimes influential upon kings and princes, but eventually came to be seen as favoring free republics over monarchies. Machiavelli in turn influenced Francis Bacon, Marchamont Needham, Harrington, John Milton, David Hume, and many others.[2]

Important modern political doctrines which stem from the new Machiavellian realism include Mandeville's influential proposal that " Private Vices by the dexterous Management of a skilful Politician may be turned into Public Benefits" (the last sentence of his Fable of the Bees), and also the doctrine of a constitutional " separation of powers" in government, first clearly proposed by Montesquieu. Both these principles are enshrined within the constitutions of most modern democracies. It has been observed that while Machiavelli's realism saw a value to war and political violence, his lasting influence has been " tamed" so that useful conflict was deliberately converted as much as possible to formalized political struggles and the economic " conflict" encouraged between free, private enterprises.[3]

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As I said in the first paragraph of this essay I will start with Thomas Hobbes, attempts were made to use the methods of the new modern physical sciences, as proposed by Bacon and Descartes, applied to humanity and politics. Notable attempts to improve upon the methodological approach of Hobbes include those of Locke, Spinoza, Giambattista Vico and Rousseau. David Hume made what he considered to be the first proper attempt at trying to apply Bacon's scientific method to political subjects, rejecting some aspects of the approach of Hobbes.[4]

Modernist republicanism openly influenced the foundation of republics during the Dutch Revolt (1568-1609), English Civil War (1642-1651), American Revolution (1775-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799)

A second phase of modernist political thinking begins with Rousseau, who questioned the natural rationality and sociality of humanity and proposed that human nature was much more malleable than had been previously thought. By this logic, what makes a good political system or a good man is completely dependent upon the chance path whole person has taken over history. This thought influenced the political (and aesthetic) thinking of Immanuel Kant, Edmund Burke and others and led to a critical review of modernist politics. On the conservative side, Burke argued that this understanding encouraged caution and avoidance of radical change. However more ambitious movements also developed from this insight into human culture, initially Romanticism and Historicism, and eventually both the Communism of Karl Marx, and the modern forms of nationalism inspired by the French Revolution, including, in one extreme, the German Nazi movement.

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Francis Bacon inspired by Machiavelli

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was one of the leading figures in natural philosophy and in the field of scientific methodology in the period of transition from the Renaissance to the early modern era. As a lawyer, member of Parliament, and Queen's Counsel, Bacon wrote on questions of law, state and religion, as well as on contemporary politics; but he also published texts in which he speculated on possible conceptions of society, and he pondered questions of ethics (Essays) even in his works on natural philosophy (The Advancement of Learning).[5]

After his studies at Trinity College, Cambridge and Gray's Inn, London, Bacon did not take up a post at a university, but instead tried to start a political career. Although his efforts were not crowned with success during the era of Queen Elizabeth, under James I he rose to the highest political office, Lord Chancellor. Bacon's international fame and influence spread during his last years, when he was able to focus his energies exclusively on his philosophical work, and even more so after his death, when English scientists of the Boyle circle (Invisible College) took up his idea of a cooperative research institution in their plans and preparations for establishing the Royal Society.[6]

Bacon's method for permeating his philosophical ideas into the collective unconscious of the age can best be summarised in his motto: *bene visit qui bene latuit* – One lives best by the hidden life. Bacon resurrected the Rosicrucian Mystery School and the Freemasons, and injected new life into these secret fraternity societies so they became vehicles for the new

Baconian philosophy of reason and scientific enquiry. Bacon, like Goethe, <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-machiavelli-and-hobbes-politics-essay/>

scorned knowledge that did not lead to action and also scorned the denial of evil in ourselves. Bacon was grateful to Machiavelli for his frank appraisal of the shadow side of human nature in politics: “ We are beholden to Machiavelli, and writers of that kind, who openly and unmasked declare what men do in fact, and not what they ought to do; for it is impossible to join the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove, without the precious knowledge of the nature of evil.” Bacon’s works touch on all aspects of humanity – politics, religion, theology, scientific method, but his most brilliant observations are psychological. Foreshadowing the discoveries by Carl Jung about the nature of the unconscious and the shadow side of man, Bacon recognized that the baseness of man should be recognized and dealt with openly, not repressed and personified as the devil.[7]

In modern political vernacular, Bacon was a conservative. He saw an ideal Government as one which was benevolent without the worst excesses of despotism by rulers, or by the majority the same as Machiavelli. “ It is almost without instance that any government was unprosperous under learned governors.”[8]

In science, Bacon sought nothing less than the reconstruction of a system that could be applied to the relief of man’s suffering. He constructed a new Classification of Science (The Advancement of Learning, 1603-05), described a new method for the Interpretation of Nature (Things Thought and Seen, 1607, Thread of the Labyrinth, 1606, Novum Organum, 1608-20). He investigated the phenomena of nature in Natural History (1622), and showed how the writers of the past had advanced their truths to the time of Bacon in Forest of Forests, published in 1624. Bacon recorded “ anticipations” of <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-machiavelli-and-hobbes-politics-essay/>

scientific results he felt would come from application of his methods in *On Origins* (1621). As a result of applying these principles, he described the basis of a new society that would emerge in *The New Atlantis* (1624). This *Magna Instauration*, the great reconstruction, was inspired by the vision Bacon had in his youth, and was a herculean task without precedent in the history of thought. As Bacon stated in the preface to *Magna Instauration*. “and I am laboring to lay the foundation not of any sect or doctrine, but of utility and power”. To Bacon, “Knowledge is power, not mere argument or ornament.” In *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon suggested that all areas of life had rational rules and an empirical basis: medicine, psychology, even dreams, predictions and other occult phenomena. Yet he comes full circle at the end of this survey, concluding that science needs to be guided by philosophy. Bacon applies this to politics.[9]

Comparison Hobbes and Machiavelli on Human Nature

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), whose current reputation rests largely on his political philosophy, was a thinker with wide-ranging interests. In philosophy, he defended a range of materialist, nominalist, and empiricist views against Cartesian and Aristotelian alternatives. In physics, his work was influential on Leibniz, and leads him into disputes with Boyle and the experimentalists of the early Royal Society. In history, he translated Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* into English, and later wrote his own history of the Long Parliament. In mathematics he was less successful, and is best remembered for his repeated unsuccessful attempts to square the circle. But despite that, Hobbes was a serious and prominent participant in the intellectual life of his time.[10]

Thomas Hobbes and Machiavelli shared a commonality in the time period in which they each lived. Separated by approximately 100 years, both thinkers were focusing on political theory. Hobbes' theory tended to focus on the social contract between a people and its government. Machiavelli's theory focused on the attributes that formed a successful ruler. Examining both theories, a comparison is evident in that Machiavelli and Hobbes both seem to discuss the human nature of society.

In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes views human nature as individual self-preservation and as a place of constant war. There is a constant struggle between men. What causes this conflict amongst men? Hobbes believes that competition and glory causes war between men. He says, "If two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies to destroy one another." He concludes that self-preservation is the only way to safeguard from being destroyed. The only way to preserve one is to become more powerful than the other. Government must also be instituted to ensure peace and security through whatever means necessary. Hobbes believes that life without government would be "poor, nasty, brutish and short." [11]

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli views human nature as pertaining to those who are ruled and those who rule. He promoted a secular society and believed that morality stood in the way. He distrusts people and believes that in a time of adversity, when the state is in need of its citizens there are few to be found." He questions the loyalty of the citizens. Because of this, he advises the Prince that, because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need keep your word to them." Machiavelli believed that <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-machiavelli-and-hobbes-politics-essay/>

the secular form of government to be the most successful. His views were to benefit the prince by maintaining power rather than to serve the well being of the citizens.

Hobbes and Machiavelli both have interesting ideas on Human Nature. Both of their ideas also contain an evident theme. The theme is the usage of fear as a means of acquiring power and maintaining it. The theme of fear is not illustrated in great detail in Hobbes' work as it is in Machiavelli's.

Nevertheless, an interesting comparison can be drawn between the two.[12]

Hobbes believes that people naturally fear death. The easiest and safest way to avoid death was to create a centralized state. An autocracy would ensure the universal desire for life. According to Hobbes, people would give up their power collectively to one ruler. In turn, the people would shut up and do what they were told. The only right they would have would be the right not to be killed. They would live under a tyrannical ruler who had all powers to decide good and evil for the people. He believes that fear is essential to maintain power and authority over the people. This is evident in his text with, "And covenants, without the sword are but words, and strength to secure a man at all." [13]

Machiavelli poses the question to the Prince "is it better to be loved than feared or vice versa?" He addresses this question in regards to what benefits a ruler more. He concludes that a prince cannot be both feared and loved. Machiavelli believes that it is better to be feared by the citizens. This is seen as an "economy of violence" in which fear is used by violence to invoke a lasting impression on the people. This "economy" must happen at the

beginning on an event where the timing is equally important. The violent act must be made into a spectacle done in the open where people can see and judge. People judge by appearances, so what they see will affect their mentality. The more violent the act the more fearful the individual will be of the same act upon them. Fear in a sense is used by both authors to train the people. It must be instilled upon them in order to maintain a successful regime. It is like the training of an animal. The master must instill on the animal that he is in charge. If he does not then the animal will overpower the master. The master must make the animal afraid of him by punishing it when it does wrong. Eventually the animal will realize who is in control.[14]

Spinoza and Machiavelli ideas.

Spinoza is one of the most important philosophers-and certainly the most radical-of the early modern period. His thought combines a commitment to Cartesian metaphysical and epistemological principles with elements from ancient Stoicism and medieval Jewish rationalism into a nonetheless highly original system. His extremely naturalistic views on God, the world, the human being and knowledge serve to ground a moral philosophy centered on the control of the passions leading to virtue and happiness. They also lay the foundations for a strongly democratic political thought and a deep critique of the pretensions of Scripture and sectarian religion. Of all the philosophers of the seventeenth-century, perhaps none have more relevance today than Spinoza.[15]

Spinoza's political thought draws from a number of sources, both classical and modern. As one commentator puts it, " Spinoza formed new conclusions from facts and concepts borrowed from others". It is worth briefly <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-machiavelli-and-hobbes-politics-essay/>

considering some of the sources of the “ facts and concepts” that he inherits.

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At some point in the mid-1650's. Spinoza began studying Latin with Franciscus Van den Enden. Van den Enden was an ex-Jesuit and radical egalitarian with revolutionary tendencies. He was put to death in 1674 after having been found guilty of conspiring to depose Louis XIV in order to establish a free republic in Normandy. Van dan Enden was an anti-clerical democrat who appears to have profoundly influenced Spinoza. One commentator has gone so far as to call Van den Enden “ the genius behind Spinoza,” claiming that Van den Enden’s writings “ contains a political theory which is in fact the same as the one worked out by Spinoza”. Whether or not this assessment is fair, it is clear that Spinoza’s thinking was nourished through his association with Van den Enden and the larger radical Cartesian circle in Amsterdam.[17]

Hobbes’ influence on Spinoza is unmistakable. We know that Spinoza read De Cive carefully and that it was among his possessions when he died in 1677. He might also have read Leviathan, which appeared in Latin in 1668, as Spinoza was completing the TTP, although we do not know this for sure. I will discuss Spinoza’s work in relationship to Machiavelli in some detail below. Here I want to mention the impact of Machiavellian on Spinoza. Machiavellian thought was introduced into Dutch political discourse by Lambert van Velthuysen, an anti-clerical, liberal physician. Velthuysen’s Dissertatio is an unabashed defense of Machiavelli thought, in which the duty to preserve one is given pride of place. Spinoza read and admired Velthuysen as a “ man of exceptional sincerity of mind,” and was thus <https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-machiavelli-and-hobbes-politics-essay/>

disconcerted when Velthuysen denounced the TTP as the work of a cunning atheist.[18]

Aside from Velthuysen, the other primary Dutch conduits for Machiavellian thought prior to Spinoza were the De la Court brothers. Most of the De la Courts' writings were published by Pieter De la Court after the death of his brother Johan in 1660. However, because it remains unclear how much Pieter added and how much he profited off his studious younger brother, I will refer to these authors of these writings simply as the De la Courts, so as to avoid attribution problems. The De la Courts were ardent republicans who maintained good relations with Johan De Witt. Indeed, De Witt is thought to have written two chapters in the second edition of their book *Interest van Holland*. The De la Courts adopted the basic features of Machiavellian anthropology, but eschewed juridical concepts like "right" and "contract", opting to analyze the civil condition in terms of the competing interests of participants. According to them, the aim of the state is to ensure that the interests of rulers are tied to the interests of the ruled, which is possible only if one adopts a series of institutional measures, such as the use of blind balloting, the removal of hereditary posts, and the rotation of offices. Republics, they argued, will be marked by greater checks against self-interested legislation than monarchies. Spinoza evidently studied these works carefully; his institutional recommendations in the *Tractatus Politicus*. [19]

It was likely the writings of the De la Courts that impressed upon Spinoza the perspicacity of Niccolo Machiavelli. The notion of balancing the interests of competing parties was ultimately derived from Machiavelli.
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Spinoza's Political Treatise is shot through with Machiavellian insights and recommendations. Right at the outset of the work, Spinoza parrots Machiavelli's critique of utopian theorizing, elevating statesmen over philosophers, since only the latter begin with a realistic conception of human psychology. Machiavellian realism pervades Spinoza's political writings, playing a particularly large role in the constitutional theorizing of the TP. Spinoza, like Machiavelli, understood that prescriptions for improving the governance of a state can be offered only after one has a proper diagnosis of the problems and a proper grasp of human nature.[20]

Machiavelli and Locke

John Locke (b. 1632, d. 1704) was a British philosopher, Oxford academic and medical researcher, whose association with Anthony Ashley Cooper (later the First Earl of Shaftesbury) led him to become successively a government official charged with collecting information about trade and colonies, economic writer, opposition political activist, and finally a revolutionary whose cause ultimately triumphed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Much of Locke's work is characterized by opposition to authoritarianism. This opposition is both on the level of the individual person and on the level of institutions such as government and church. For the individual, Locke wants each of us to use reason to search after truth rather than simply accept the opinion of authorities or be subject to superstition. He wants us to proportion assent to propositions to the evidence for them. On the level of institutions it becomes important to distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate functions of institutions and to make the corresponding distinction for the uses of force by these institutions. The positive side of

Locke's anti-authoritarianism is that he believes that using reason to try to grasp the truth, and determining the legitimate functions of institutions will optimize human flourishing for the individual and society both in respect to its material and spiritual welfare. This in turn, amounts to following natural law and the fulfillment of the divine purpose for humanity.[21]

John Locke and Niccolo Machiavelli are political philosophers writing in two different lands and two different times. Locke's 17th century England was on the verge of civil war and Machiavelli's 15th century Italy was on the verge of invasion. The focus of this part of my essay is to examine the treatment of "the people" by both authors, to discover what Machiavelli and Locke write about the people's role in their different structures of government. In particular, this paper seeks to understand that role in regards to the political power each author yields to, or withholds from, the people. In addition, these treatments of power and the people will be compared to the writings of another timeless political philosopher, Plato. By *Discourses on Livy*, *The Prince*, and *The Republic* against one another, this paper will show how writers from three very different centuries all agreed upon an identical notion of the relationship between the power of the people and their role in government. This theory is not readily apparent upon initial reading of these authors. Indeed, most political philosophers would argue that each author has a very distinct notion of what role the people play in government. Therefore, an ideal place to start is in the differences of each author's portrayal of the people and the political power they wield. Machiavelli, the most pessimistic of the three writers in regards to humans and human nature, writes that all men can be accused of "that defect" which Livy calls

vanity and inconsistency. He continues by writing: "...people are nothing other than a brute animal that, although of a ferocious and feral nature, has always been nourished in prison and in servitude".[22]

Animals, that are by their nature ferocious, become scared and confused when released from captivity. Without the shelter and food they had come to expect when "domesticated," they are more susceptible to future attempts at captivity. Man also becomes scared and confused in freedom after living under the government of others. Machiavelli writes that these men lack understanding of "public defense or public offense," and quickly return "beneath the yoke that is most often heavier than the one it had removed from its neck a little before". Men are docile like domesticated dogs or cattle, according to this description, and have a role in government of little political power. With Plato, there is a continuation of the same theme started by Machiavelli.[23]

The oligarchic rule the city through the license of the multitude, and the orderly rule in business through the disadvantage of the multitude. Thus, Machiavelli sees the people as subjugated and Plato sees the people as fatuous, both doomed to political ineptitude. With Locke, however, the character of the people is redeemed. The people, for Locke, represent a political power akin to force. Indeed, the people are the ultimate source of power for Locke's government, whether that government is a legislative body or a prince. In the closing chapter of his second treatise, Locke details the ways that government can dissipate when rulers misuse their power.

According to Machiavelli, "...the people neither desire to be commanded nor oppressed by the great". In this sense, the people constitute a "humor" of the city, the opposing "humor" being the desire of the "great" to command and oppress the people. A man should be wary of becoming prince with the support of the great instead of the support of the people. Without their support, the prince is doomed to govern either a territory filled with an unmanageable "great" or a large body of unruly people. Indeed, Machiavelli echoes this in a later chapter by stating "... a prince should have two fears: one within, on account of his subjects; the other outside, on account of external powers".[24]

In both this text and Locke's Two Treatises, the authors yield an incredible amount of power to the people: the power to both influence the creation of and bring about the destruction of governments. For Machiavelli, the people are a large body of people, viewed as more formidable, and, therefore, more influential, than the great aristocrats in principality building. For Locke, the people exert a similar influence over the building of a commonwealth, since it is from the people that the power of the prince or legislature originates. Moreover, the people can decide to bring about the end of a particular regime of government if they feel that it no longer adheres to its responsibilities. Thus, the people, in both Machiavelli and Locke, appear to share a similar amount of power both in the formation of government and in its oversight: namely, that of adjudication. In the Discourses, Machiavelli writes of a cyclical succession of governments, one after another, each one rising to prominence only to fall to licentiousness. It is through this cycle that Machiavelli demonstrates the power of the people to adjudicate, and he

argues that it is this adjudication that perpetuates the cycle. Kings rise to prominence based upon character, until the monarchy becomes hereditary and degenerates into “sumptuousness and lasciviousness”. [25]

Machiavelli and Locke both considered the nature of government and man's individual interests as they relate to governmental structures. Machiavelli's idea of fortune and Locke's 'state of nature' concept both shaped the theorists arguments about the purpose of political life. It has been posited that for Machiavelli, politics is an unpredictable arena in which ambition, deception and violence render the idea of the common good meaningless, while Locke would argue that political or civil society exists only to preserve the rights of the individual. It can be argued that for both Machiavelli and Lock, political activity, then, becomes merely a means of satisfying selfish ends. [26]

Napoleón Bonaparte a follower of Machiavelli

One of the greatest military commanders and a risk taking gambler; a workaholic genius and an impatient short term planner; a vicious cynic who forgave his closest betrayers; a misogynist who could enthrall men; Napoleon Bonaparte was all of these and more, the twice-emperor of France whose military endeavors and sheer personality dominated Europe in person for a decade, and in thought for a century. [27]

In 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli wrote a piece of work called, The Prince. It was written to all principalities, and that which is parallel to what Machiavelli suggests is often referred to as being Machiavellian. The purpose of this essay is to ask the question Is Napoleon Bonaparte Machiavellian in Nature?

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By the evidence found from Napoleon's life and accomplishments it can be said that he was not Machiavellian in nature, which can be demonstrated by numerous accounts as well as some suggested characteristics given by Machiavelli, to support this theory. This essay will take a look at Napoleon's leadership skills, his beliefs and ideals, as well as his personality that made him a great political figure. These aspects of Napoleon's persona give a description of how his character was different from that in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. In the area of leadership, Napoleon had many qualities that set him apart from the rest. Napoleon was a great leader but at times his people hated him. Machiavelli believed that, one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire an empire, but not glory.

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Machiavelli said, it remains now to see what the modes and government of a prince should be with subjects and with friends. Apparently Napoleon was not a good friend considering when he was exiled the second time his friends that had been with him since the beginning were said to have killed him.

Based on this it can be said that Napoleon does not display characteristics of being Machiavellian.

Napoleon believed that he would be a much more successful leader if the people liked him. This is thought so because when he was trying to get political support by the people he did not use fear, he found something they all wanted to hear and he said them. Even though Machiavelli said, ... it is much safer to be feared, then loved, if one has to lack one of the two.

Napoleon also tried to make the people like him by setting up the Napoleonic
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Code, which was a set of laws that gave religious freedom and equality. Another illustration of Napoleon's beliefs and, or ideals was, instead of appearing to have Machiavellian characteristics, Napoleon actually had them. Thus it is not necessary for a prince to have all the above mentioned qualities in fact, but it is indeed necessary to appear to have them. Napoleon was actually a feared leader and thought of people as disposable but Machiavelli only said to appear to have these traits. The final area of Napoleon's behavior is his personality. Machiavelli stated, ... it is very natural and ordinary to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised and not blamed; but when they cannot, and want to do it anyway, here lie the error and the blame.