MACHIAVELLI'S IMPACT OF USING THE WORD VIRTÙ

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Abstract

Machiavelli, needless to say, made great contributions to the modern political science. Also, he has been seen as the founder of modern political science. Thus, he and his works has been captured the attention of all modern political scientists for centuries. What makes him one of the most popular political scientists is the originality of his ideas. *Virtù* in the Machiavellian sense is one of the best terms to be analyzed in order to denote and summarize the originality of his ideas.

In order to present the effects of the Machiavellian virtù on the modern political science, I try to explain firstly, the meaning of the term; and secondly, the implications of the term in the Machiavellian context, or in other words, what makes original this term for the modern political science. In this study, I want to analyze the impact of the use of virtù in Machiavelli's context on the modern political science by reviewing the literature about him, as well as his famous book *Prince*.

1. MEANING OF THE MACHIAVELLIAN VIRTÙ

Ebenstein and Ebenstein noted that Machiavellian virtù's meaning is 'different from, and even antithetical to, the Christian concept of virtue. He used the term virtù in its original Roman meaning, and even adds some shades of meaning of his own. He went back to the original pagan meaning of Roman virtue, but expands and adapts it to his thought and to the restless and violent world he lives in. Virtù for Machiavelli means *military valor*' (Ebenstein and Ebenstein 1991, 319). Also these writers explain the term by the following sentence: 'When Machiavelli applies the term virtù to the successful ruler, he means the ambitious, ruthless, crafty, successful ruler, and not the ruler who is regular churchgoer, mindful of other men's wives, and generally a practicing moralist' (Ebenstein and Ebenstein 1991, 320).

Leonard describes the term somewhat in a same manner: 'Virtù as Machiavelli uses the term is closer to the Latin virtus in its connotation of manly valor and signifies an excellence that manifests itself most clearly in military and political affairs, perhaps because it is associated most prominently with the capacity to act boldly at critical moments. Evidently

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virtù is not the same thing as virtue' (Leornard 1992, 202). Skinner argued that although it is often said that Machiavelli didn't give any definition of virtù, he used the term with complete consistency. 'Following his classical and humanist authorities, he treats it as quality which enables a prince to withstand the blows of fortune, to attract the goddess's favor, and to rise in consequence the heights of princely fame, winning honor and glory for himself and security for his government' (Skinner 1981, 35).

Parel, in his analysis of the term, said that the word which Machiavelli chooses to describe human causality in politics is virtù. On the other hand he explained that Machiavelli 'uses the same word in a number of different senses. For example, the quality of an inanimate object such as a bow or a weapon is called its virtù. In The Prince he speaks of the virtù of a new prince and the virtù of a bow in the same paragraph...There is virtù of the body just as there is virtù of the spirit; there is virtù of specific individuals as there is virtù of groups generals, armies, people, citizens, republics' (Parel 1992, 86). Also Parel underlined that 'It is important to be aware of the polyvalent character of this term in Machiavelli's thought. Such awareness, if nothing else, should at least remind us that virtù has no affinity with moral virtue. The predominant sense in which virtù is used in his writings, however, and for which the term has acquired its importance concerns the area of human causation' (Parel 1992, 86). Finally, he gives a description of the term: 'we may describe virtù as the stable disposition or ability of an individual or group by which he, she, or it is enabled to perform acts conducive to the good of the state.... In its rarer form, it is the ability which enables a private person to become most public of all persons - the founder or the innovator of a state. While it is compatible with the aggressive behavior of statesmen towards other states, it is also compatible with their lawful and constitutional behavior towards their own citizens' (Parel 1992, 86-7). After reviewing the meaning of the term in the literature, we can turn our attention to the implication of this term in the Machiavellian context.

2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE MACHIAVELLIAN VIRTÙ
2.1 Human Nature

Parel argued that if we analyzed virtù in the Machiavellian contexts, we can fully appreciate its ethical implications because 'the

idea of virtù presupposes a certain view of human nature' (Parel 1992, 87). Additionally he stated that Christian humanism does not form the foundation of Machiavelli's notion of virtù: 'He prefers the view that humans are part of material nature like other brutes. The notions of what is right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust, arise in them only as a result of living in society for the purposes of security. There is nothing in human nature which requires humans to live a life of moral rectitude. The only requirement of their nature is that they should live in security for the purpose of satisfying their needs for glory and riches. Thus, while he frequently speaks of the virtù of body (corpo) and spirit (animo), he does not speak of the virtue of the soul (anima) ' (Parel 1992, 87). After this analysis of the human nature in Machiavellian context he concluded that 'any anthropology that excluded anima was ipso facto understood to be materialistic' (Parel 1992, 88).

On the other hand, Parel argued that according to Machiavelli's thought, virtù's effectiveness depends on certain cosmological factors one of which is the quality of the times. 'The need to conform modes of behavior to the quality of times is a basic presupposition of both The Prince and the Discourses' (Parel 1992, 92). Also he pointed out that one of Machiavelli's well-known ideas, 'opportunity' (occasione) is connected to the idea of time. 'Indeed, the efficacy of virtù depends on both the recognition and the utilization of the opportunity at hand. One of the reasons why he insists that Cesare Borgia and Alexander VI were great men is that they were men skilled in recognizing their occasione. Virtù can best succeed if heaven also cooperates: and heaven cannot give a better opportunity for 'virtù and glory' than to give a new prince a city already in a state of corruption?' (Parel 1992, 92).

2.2 Ethics

The ethics of Machiavellian virtù has been debated over centuries. For example, Jacques Maritain accuses Machiavelli of breaking the connection between political ethics and morality, metaphysics and theology, and of destroying 'the human practical intellect and the organism of practical wisdom' (Martin 1956, 321). Since Machiavelli accepts as 'normal' the fact of political immorality, it is easy to agree with this consideration. As Maritain underlines, 'A plain disregard of

good and evil has been considered the rule of human politics' (Martin 1956, 320). In the Machiavellian ethics, everything is permitted as long as it serves the power interests of the fatherland. Maritain argues additionally that, 'before Machiavelli rulers did not hesitate to apply bad faith, perfidy, falsehood, assassination, and the like to the attainment of their ambitions. But in doing so, the presumption was that they felt guilty, or that they ought to feel guilty. After Machiavelli, however, no crime done in the name of the fatherland is admitted to be evil before it is committed, although after it is committed humankind may pronounce judgment on it on the basis of some standards of positive justice. Political crime may be judged as having been a mistake, but no longer as a moral evil' (Martin 1956, 321-22).

On the other hand, Benedetto Croce argued that Machiavelli's originality lies in his discovery of the autonomy of politics from ethics. 'It is a commonplace that Machiavelli discovered the necessity and the autonomy of politics, which is beyond moral good and evil... and has its own laws against which it is vain to rebel, nor can politics itself be exorcized or chased out of the world with holy water' (Croce 1952, 657). Croce saw the practical as being independent of any moral direction. In order to show his understanding of the prince as part man and part beast of prey, Machiavelli uses the image of the Centaur (an invention of the poets), 'and it is to the animal element that he ascribes the force of mind' (Croce 1952, 657).

Berlin challenged Croce about this point by arguing that Machiavelli, far from separating politics from morality, introduces a morality of his own. 'For Machiavelli the ends which he advocates are those to which he thinks wise human beings who understand reality will dedicate their lives. Ultimate ends in this sense, whether or not they are those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, are what is usually meant by moral values' (Berlin 1972, 169). Parel noted that 'Machiavelli prefers as his ultimate end what Berlin calls a 'pagan' ideal of politics, according to which the common good of the fatherland is superior to the good of the individual' (Parel 1992, 94). 'Since men are beings made by nature to live in communities, their communal purposes are the ultimate values from which the rest are derived or with which their ends as individuals are identified' (Berlin 1972, 178). From this point, Berlin evaluates the position of public and private morality in Machiavelli by stating that: 'There is more than one world, more than one set of virtues: confusion between

them is disastrous (Berlin 1972, 184). 'The state and people are governed in a different way from an individual. It is not the well-being of individuals that makes cities great, but of the community' (Berlin 1972, 185).

Berlin pointed out that the originality of Machiavelli lies in his rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic as the only ethic suited for social and political life. He isolates politics as a field of study, from the theological world picture (Berlin 1972, 201). Additionally, Berlin argues that although Machiavelli does not explicitly favors pluralism, after him 'doubt is liable to infect all monistic constructions' (Berlin 1972, 204). Thus, he unintentionally paves the way for modern pluralism in morals and in conceptions of virtue.

Leo Strauss also pointed out that Machiavelli's teaching is normative and ethical. Because his ultimate aim is to replace the classical and Christian ideas of political virtue with those of his own. 'Machiavelli does not oppose to the normative political philosophy of the classics a merely descriptive or analytical political science; he rather opposes to a wrong normative teaching a true normative teaching' (Strauss 1969, 233). Machiavelli's teaching is that other than being as an instrument of those who seek political power, moral virtue has no place in politics. Thus, his analysis of virtue is wholly destructive of moral virtue. Strauss writes: 'Moral virtue, wished for by society and required by it, is dependent on society and therefore subject to the primary needs of society. It does not consist in the proper order of the soul. It has no other source than the needs of society; it has no second and higher source in the needs of the mind' (Strauss 1969, 233). He quotes from the Martelli's work: 'The highest need of society is patriotism, love of the fatherland. The state, whether monarchical or republican, is for him essentially a fatherland. Love of the fatherland defines the limits of our love as political animals. And our love as political animals cannot and does not embrace humanity or the community of fatherlands' (Martelli 1971, 36).

Parel in this sense pointed out that: 'The good of the fatherland is to be attained at all costs; even the good of the soul may be sacrificed for the sake of fatherland. There is no admission that the interests of the fatherland must be secured within a framework of natural justice which has its source in the nature of the collective human good. In other words, the virtù required for attaining liberty, prosperity, empire, and glory is incompatible with moral virtue. Glory and riches are the ultimate ends of individuals; they are also the ultimate ends of fatherlands. Moral virtues

have no independent status. They may be tolerated so long as they contribute to empire, glory and prosperity, or they may be sacrificed if they stand in the way' (Parel 1992, 96-7).

Plamenatz from a different perspective argues that critics 'who say that morality, to Machiavelli, is something different from what it is to most people are not entirely wrong... but they exaggerate. They do so because they misunderstand the distinction he makes between what he calls virtù and ordinary goodness. Since Machiavelli thinks virtù indispensable to the citizen and the State, and sometimes says that goodness is harmful to them, it is easy to conclude that he makes a sharp distinction between private and public morality, between what makes good men and what makes good citizen. This, I am sure, is a mistake; there is a distinction, but less sharp and more subtle than is often opposed' (Plamenatz 1992, 66).

2.3 Public Good and Common Good

Parel pointed out the differentiation of public good and common good in Machiavellian context by explaining that the soul and its needs have no place in Machiavelli's politics. According to Parel, in Machiavelli's notion of the public good, separation of the health of the soul from the health of the state or, in other words, the private good from the public good is mandatory, although classical and Christian conceptions of political virtue never radically separated these notions. 'The common good must always prevail over the good of the individual. Nor is there any need to bring the two realms - the private and the public - into fruitful contact with each other. This is why he asserts that morally virtuous actions and morally reprehensible actions can contribute equally to the public common good. Thus liberality and miserliness, generosity and rapacity, cruelty and mercy, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, chastity and lasciviousness, integrity and deceitfulness, being religious and being irreligious, etc., can be equally effective, depending on how they contribute to the public good. The vices of Hannibal and the virtues of Scipio, in Machiavelli's view, did not make any moral difference as far as their behavior 'in the public realm' was concerned. Nor did Savonarola's probity do him any good in his hour of need. Romulus's fratricide, on the other hand, did not harm him in any way. The radical separation of politics into public and private realms, without the

possibility of any fruitful contact between them, is the dark side of Machiavellian virtù' (Plamenatz 1992, 98).

However even when he favors for the radical separation of the private and the public, Machiavelli still wants those who operate in the public realm to have a reputation for private virtue. Indeed, Machiavellian virtù cannot work effectively except in the shadow of such a reputation. For a reputation for private virtue remains important, since humans Judge more by appearance than by reality, 'more by their eyes than by their hands'. 'Everyone sees what you seem to, few experience what you really are and these few do not dare to set themselves up against the opinion of the majority supported by the majesty of the state.... Let a prince then concern himself with the acquisition or the maintenance of a state; the means employed will always be considered honorable and praised by all, for the mass of mankind is always swayed by appearances and the outcome of an enterprise. And in the world there is only the mass, for the few find their place only when the majority has no base of support' (Machiavelli 1947, 52).

'In the final analysis', Parel said, 'virtù is a disposition to do whatever is necessary for the good of the fatherland. Such a disposition is not compatible with moral virtue. In the classical and the Christian conceptions of virtue, internal integrity and public life are held to be compatible because the life of the soul and the life in the state are thought to be intimately connected to the notion of the good. It is the task of political prudence to safeguard, cultivate, and bring about that good in all that one does' (Parel 1992, 99).

2.4 International Politics and War

It is clearly understood that Machiavellian virtù permits the use of any means for the preservation of the state. Parel explains this fact by saying that 'it is Machiavelli's insight that if states had at their disposal only the principles of moral virtue, they would not be able to meet their security needs. This is the case especially with respect to war. A state that adheres only to moral virtues will be unevenly matched against one that adheres to virtù. The ability to meet security needs by means of moral virtue alone, diminishes in proportion to the prevalence of bad states in the world' (Parel 1992, 99).

Thus, according to Parel, 'international politics expose the alleged inadequacy of moral virtues and the need to replace them with

Machiavellian virtù. Thus, Machiavelli draws a connection between the ethics of virtù and the politics of 'reason of state', between the view which claims that statesmen can resort to any means in war and the view which says that states have no higher obligation than self-preservation' (Parel 1992, 99).

On the question of which ethic has the final validity: the ethic of virtù or that of moral virtues, according to Parel, 'Maritain and Strauss take differing stands. Maritain says that Machiavelli is obliged to defend virtù because of his radical pessimism about human nature, because of his belief that humans are beasts of prey endowed only with intelligence and powers of calculation' (Parel 1992, 99).

Parel summarizes the view of Maritain in the following quotation: 'According to Maritain, such radical pessimism is not justified; because he insists that human nature remains good 'in its root-tendencies'. This is why humans are able to struggle, despite factual evil in the world, for the realization of potential good. The struggle between those who argue from factual evil and those who argue from the potential for good has been the source of the motive power for human improvement. Machiavelli's view that factual evil presents the whole truth about humankind, and that for this reason virtù and 'reason of state' are the only effective bases for security in the international system, thus cannot be accepted as valid. For the motion that moves everything in the human world is the motion towards the good, and evil has no decisive influence here. War, therefore, does not reveal the basis of any intrinsic ethical bankruptcy, since war can be used to defend the potential for good, and as such this type of use of force is a virtuous use of force' (Parel 1992, 99-100).

Then Parel compares the Strauss's views in the following quotation: 'Strauss, on the other hand, claims that the stand which the Machiavellian state is obliged to take on war, the necessity that war imposes on it to accept technology as a tool of war, and the acceptance by the state of the modern notion of science, 'render impossible the good city in the classical sense'. In other words, war, technology, and science have removed the old distinction between good and bad regimes, and with it the distinction between the virtuous city and the corrupt city. Insofar as this is true, all states are obliged to practice Machiavellian virtù. The so-called bad states may be said to impose their habits on the so-called good states today. 'Only on this point does Machiavelli's

contention that the good cannot be good because there are so many bad ones prove to possess a foundation' (Parel 1992, 100).

Finally Parel concludes his analysis by the following evaluation: 'Maritain's point, however, is that the practice of moral virtues, of prudence and justice in particular, is not so intimately tied to the classical notion of the good city that they cannot be practiced under modern conditions. In fact, the adaptation of these virtues to modern conditions is the task of political science today' (Parel 1992, 100).

Conclusion

By reviewing the comments on the Machiavellian virtù, we reached a point where we can not exactly say good or bad about its implications on political science. This not only because the complexity of the term, but also because Machiavelli himself exclude the words good and bad and he rather used effective or ineffective, successful or failed. Thus, if we try to evaluate the impact of virtù in the Machiavellian sense, we should conclude that this term by challenging the classical political studies has considered to be successful and effective by most of the scholars.

Özet

Machiavelli çağdaş siyaset biliminin kurucuları arasında gösterilmektedir. Bunun en büyük nedeni Machiavelli'nin iyi-kötü gibi değer yargıları içeren kavramları siyaset ve iktidar ilişkileri alanından soyutlama yaklaşımıdır. Bu yazıda Machiavelli'nin genel olarak bütün eserlerinde özel olarak da dilimize 'Hükümdar' olarak çevrilen 'The Prince' adlı ünlü eserinde kullanmış olduğu virtú (güçlü olmak) kelimesinin virtue (erdemli olmak) kelimesi yerine seçilmesinin sonuçları üzerinde durulacaktır.

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