

THE COMMON POINTS OF MACHIAVELLIANISM AND FASCISM

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ABSTRACT

There is no consensus among political thinkers on Machiavellian political thought or Machiavellianism about the relation between a thinker's personality and his ideas. Some critics consider Machiavelli a supporter of militarism, authoritarianism, and pragmatism, and others find him a realist, expedient, and proponent of a lofty society. This study discusses the effects of the Machiavellian political perspective signified in *The Prince* and how it imprinted Hitler's fragment of the totalitarian schools of the twentieth century, namely Fascism reflected in *Mein Kampf*. This study investigates the origins of Fascism rooted in Machiavellianism, and the hypothesis is the influence of Machiavellian thought on Fascism. Machiavelli's recommendations, such as hegemony, coercion, propaganda, authoritarian leadership, social deception, democratization, abuse of religion, and extreme militarism, directly or indirectly attracted Hitler's attention. This research exploits the descriptive-analytical mold to develop a scientific response to the specified question through qualitative content analysis via investigating the roots of the policy myths of our time and age.

Keywords: Machiavellianism, The Prince, Fascism, Mein Kampf, Hitler, Politics

MAKYAVELCİ SİYASİ DÜŞÜNCE İLE FAŞİZM'İN ORTAK NOKTALARI

ÖZET

Makyavelci siyasi düşünce'nin Machiavelli'in kişiliğiyle ilişkisi hakkında siyasi düşünürler arasında fikir birliği yoktur. Bazı eleştirmenler Machiavelli'i militarizmin, otoriterliğin ve pragmatizmin bir destekçisi olarak düşünürken, diğerleri onu gerçekçi, dürüst ve ulu bir toplumun savunucusu olarak nitelendirirler. Bu çalışma, *Prens*'te ifade edilen Makyavelist politik perspektifin etkilerini Hitler'in Kavgam'da belirttiği ve yirminci yüzyılın totaliter okullarının önemli parçası olan Faşizme yansıtarak, damgaladığını tartışmaktadır. Böylece çalışma, asıl, faşist ilkelerin kökeninin Makyavelizm'e dayanıp dayanmadığını arařtırmaktadır. Çalışmada, Machiavelli'in hegemonya, zorlama, propaganda, otoriter liderlik, sosyal aldatma, demokratikleşme, dinin kötüye kullanılması ve aşırı militarizm gibi düşünceleri, doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak Hitler'in dikkatini çektiği örneklendirilerek, Makyavelci siyasi düşüncenin faşizm üzerinde etkisi olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bu arařtırma, analitik kalıptan yararlanarak ve son çağın politika mitlerinin köklerini arařtırarak, nitel içerik analiz yolu ile belirlenen soruya bilimsel bir yanıt bulmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Makyavelci siyasi düşünce, Prens, Faşizm, Kavgam, Hitler, Politika

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INTRODUCTION

The political perspective of Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (1469-1527) is represented in *The Prince* (1513), which brings about the object to contemporary political debates to comprehend theories thoroughly. Due to reactions to Machiavelli's works, over time, perceptions of Machiavelli on policy have been tarnished. While Bacon, Spinoza, and Hegel tried to purify Machiavelli, Macaulay, Meyer, Fletcher, and Shakespeare sought to refute his ideas. In the twentieth century, the controversy over Machiavellian theory continued, and some discovered the root of Fascism in his theories. This study discovers the impact of Machiavellianism on the German school of Fascism, called Nazism, and the similarities between the theoretical foundations of *The Prince* (1532) by Machiavelli and the autobiographical manifesto by Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler submitted in *Mein Kampf* (1925) by questioning whether Nazism rooted in Machiavellian ideas or not?

1. MACHIAVELLIANISM

Merriam-Webster dictionary has defined Machiavellianism as “the view that politics is amoral and that any means however unscrupulous can justifiably be used in achieving political power.” According to Leo Strauss, in order to understand the meaning of political philosophy, it must be noted that any “political action aims at either preservation or change.” (1954: 343) All political actions are based on two ideas: “When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent a change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better.” (Strauss, 1954: 343) Machiavelli established a political philosophy by changing the tradition of political philosophy, whose interpretations guided us to a different view of human nature. (Jones, 1947: 388). Machiavelli reduces the standard of social action, and this reduction of criteria increases the probability of realization of the degraded criteria. Machiavelli pursues the public good in societies through practices, such as freedom from foreign domination, stability, law, success, and glory, and these goals make actions virtuous while these goals justify all means. The context of virtue cannot explain the good of society; rather, virtue must be defined in the context of the public good.

Machiavelli never addressed the term natural law because he was thoroughly acquainted with the source of the legality. The aim was not to cut off past thoughts, but Machiavelli was inclined to the dramatic inhuman temperament between human beings. The unintentional result has dramatically increased the savagery against society and freedom. He replaced charitable accounting with philanthropy and reconsidered all traditional goals. Perhaps the narrowing horizon Machiavelli impacted was anti-religious anger. (Strauss, 1954). Machiavelli commenced modern political thought and played a significant role in developing political philosophies. (Whelan, 2005: 181) Machiavelli defined modern political thought (Lucchese, 2017), and before him, no philosopher had developed a specific strategy to ensure the result of thoughts. Machiavelli was the first philosopher to coincidence with propaganda to control the future, which is the opposite of the known distortion of the listeners and seduction and coercion.

Machiavelli authorizes politics for consolidation to be devoid of sanctity; he never offered a general theory for maintaining power developed by technical rules. An incomplete model of the political realities in his writings on politics does not notice the conspiracy of governments (Amato, 1972: 13). According to Cassirer (2013), Machiavelli was not fully aware of the effects of his political theory. As a great historian, he did not investigate specific aspects of certain periods of history, although Machiavelli believed that history is constantly repeated. (Amato, 1972: 125) In the introduction of *The Prince*, as a political decree, the historical process that Machiavelli formulated is mentioned as his “knowledge of the deeds of great men, learned from the wide experience of recent events and a constant reading of classical authors” (Machiavelli, 2008: 1). However, Machiavelli’s personal interest does not make him justify Cesare Borgia; he idealizes the behavior of Cesare Borgia but not praises him. Even though Alexander the Great imitated Caesar (Machiavelli, 2008: 253), Machiavelli cannot pass over the interesting formalities used by Caesar.

Machiavelli’s theorist mind relentlessly sought to formulate human action in the form of “rigorous standards of scientific method” (Machiavelli, 2008: 88) to see general motives behind trivial events. Machiavelli predicted the future, even though he could not clarify events precisely; he realized the future, spoke vaguely about it, and provided a ‘timeless’ model for his recommendations. He described the principles of using power against people that are the same for all power structures in all times (Machiavelli, 2008: 99). The unification of a country under the rule of the Prince is an evolutionary process that leads to a more stable republican system (Holler, 2009: 325) as he defended authoritarian republicanism. This approach is reflected in *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*, a book comprised of three volumes, in which the first section discusses the internal structure of a republic in the Machiavellian governmental system.

The depth and purpose of Machiavelli’s thoughts cannot be adequately followed because there is “no surviving manuscript copy of it in Machiavelli’s own handwriting.” (Honeycut, n.d.) However, Machiavelli’s philosophical and political identity and the literary critic’s interpretation of his thoughts demonstrate the importance of Machiavellianism. Cassirer says Machiavelli’s commentators are “so very much absorbed in the particulars of his life that they begin to lose a grip on the whole; they do not see the wood for the trees.” (2013: 128) He refers to Machiavelli’s comment on Prince of Siena, who gave the role to men “he had once distrusted than with the other citizens” and says, “a prince will be able to win over to his side those men who were unfriendly during the early stage of his principedom if they are the kind who need support in order to retain their position.” (Machavelli, 2008: 323).

In 1815, a copy of *The Prince* was in “Napoléon’s carriage on the battlefield of Waterloo.” (Dettling, 2019) In the twentieth century, characterized by great wars, authoritarian and totalitarian groups attacked the liberal world. Political idealism succumbed to dashes of realism is declared as the followers of Machiavelli’s ideas in *The Prince*.

In 1924, Benito Mussolini—in his introduction to *The Prince*—attributed Fascism to Machiavelli. (Lien, 1929; Femia, 2004). The second great war of the former century ended with the bloody defeat of Hitler, who wanted to subjugate the world. In this endeavor, the most frightening face of extreme and unbridled Machiavellianism was recognized. Evidently, political thinkers of the past influence current issues, build today’s political discourse, and define the contemporary political discourse by “supplying arguments justifying or criticising political action, state institutions and public policy.” (Edwards & Townshend, 2002: 1) Even the limited “assumptions and theoretical frameworks,” political thinkers’ ideas and theories “can be adapted to shed light on current concerns.” (Edwards & Townshend, 2002: 1)

2. FASCISM IN MACHIAVELLIAN THOUGHTS

Fascism is a quite different phenomenon from the usual political forms in some European countries—between the two world wars—was the product of the socio-economic crises of the years following World War I to save the crisis-stricken capitalist society from the impasse. Fascism is always a mass-based, “middle class movement,” and it achieves its reactionary goals. (Reich, 1980: 35) Some groups in Italy after 1918 called Fascists, selected the symbol of the ancient Romans to be distincted. At the same period, Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Party came to power in Germany and its members felt ideological solidarity with their Italian counterparts. The political form of Nazism or National Socialism was established in the German regime between 1933 and 1945. Nazism is a type of totalitarian fascist ideology, but the most crucial distinction between Fascism and Nazism is the emphasis on the notion of ‘race.’ While the concept of the masses was emphasized in Germany, there was not such a strong globally defined tradition. Hitler’s worldview was analyzed through the racist interpretation of world history, a Darwinist socialist view of life—based on the strong’s survival and weak’s destruction—and military preference to make Germany a world power.

The common denominator of Fascism, which Hitler addressed in *Mein Kampf*, has rooted in Machiavellianism. Although the roots of Fascism in Machiavelli’s political thought cannot be discovered explicitly, by examining the main principles of Machiavellian political thought, fascist ideology is cognizable. Machiavelli mentions that the goal of maintaining the governmental duty of the Prince is to protect the country and government for securing his position. (Machiavelli, 2008: 105-167) In fascist governments, intimidation and coercion help leaders to control the nation. Democratization through propaganda and a steady hand on the tiller via religion serves to preserve the capitalist system of imperialism.

3. HEGEMONY

There are traces of hegemonic spirit in Machiavellian works due to his international experiences as a diplomat. (Leung, 2000: 3) Machiavelli advises Lorenzo de' Medici to expand and unify his ruled territory by weakening the powerful neighbor governments and strengthening and unifying small countries. (Machiavelli, 2008: 102) A planned friendship is “to keep up alliances with kings or princes” without considering whether they eagerly help him or are only careful in biting him. (Machiavelli, 2008: 173) The Prince who is inconsistent with his ruling territory must be the leader and supporter of the neighboring governments, and he reduces the power of other powerful governments. Machiavelli discusses the experience of the Romans in applying this policy as the general policy used for some events: “In the regions they conquered the Romans carefully attended to these matters: they sent in colonial settlements retained the less powerful without increasing their strength, humbled the powerful and forbade potent invaders to gain an influential grip. And I should like Greece to suffice as my sole example.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 113) The conflict between governments is a constant reality and some thinkers evaluate the evil nature of human beings as the only cause of strife; however, Thucydides finds human nature the cause of any conflict. Machiavelli agrees with Thucydides about wars and conflicts as the natural side of government and also humanity. (Dogan, 2004: 67-74) According to Machiavelli, the Prince should never ally with someone stronger than himself or attack him unless it is inevitable. The government must be more potent than its neighbors and a mighty army is needed to maintain and expand the government. (Leung, 2000: 5)

Hitler's views on imperialism are more or less the same. According to him, pure heroic German ancestors conquered vast lands with a sword and colonized non-German peoples to make their nation. He says, “nature preserves the strength of the race and the species; she raises it to the highest degree of efficiency” (Hitler, 2018: 158). The expansionist plan that Hitler had openly propagated since 1925 included Eastern and Southeastern European countries and parts of western Russia in line with the expansionist goals of German imperialism during World War I. At the beginning of *Mein Kampf*, the alliance aims to create a central power to achieve ultimate victory, and the central power is the formation of imperialism, while the great victory is German domination over the former colonies. Hitler says, “German-Austria must return to the great German Motherland. And not for mere economic reasons,” and continues, “even if it were to be economically disadvantageous, it still must take place.” (Hitler, 2018: 43) The reason is the matter of blood, and Germans should not “engage in colonialism until they have brought all their sons together in one state.” (Hitler, 2018: 43)

For Hitler, the most potent country necessarily takes over the leadership of the world system, in which the dependent nations are under the protection of the most powerful nations. Thus, imperialism was the most crucial trend in Hitler's political perspective. The nationalist slogans used by Hitler later became the basis of his slogan of German imperialism, such as *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (One people, one realm, one leader) (Oxford Reference, n.d.).

Hitler not only intended to ally with the great powers—under Machiavelli’s advice—he expanded territory and avoided participating in any collective military agreements. His rejection of the 1934 Treaty of Eastern Europe—a security-military agreement between eight powerful European countries—was critical. Both Germany and Italy extensively used the politics of the reproductive population as another basis for justifying their claims.

Kakel (2013: 19) reminds Hitler’s imperialist and social Darwinist perspective on the idea of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ races and the combination of late-nineteenth-century racist and imperialist views into a new twentieth-century racial imperialist ideology of ‘race and space.’ The German-Greek historian, Hagen Fleischer, categorized victims of German expansionism in two groups; a) a group of countries such as the Soviet Union, France, and Czechoslovakia conquered due to Germany’s “hegemonic aspirations” (Hirschfeld, 2010: 52); b) the group “whose occupation had been necessary or inevitable for military or strategical reasons in order to secure the primary goals—like Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and some Balkan states.” (Hirschfeld, 2010: 52) c) The other countries were in-between categories—such as Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary, Italy, or Greece—due to “ex-post-facto” and the result of the war and “strategical aspirations.” (Hirschfeld, 2010: 52)

4. SUPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

Machiavelli’s theoretical foundation is the principle of military power and coercion to maintain the state. (Machiavelli, 2008: 217) The newest and most surprising feature of speeches by the Prince is the explicit recognition of force in politics. (Machiavelli, 2008: 113) Machiavelli defends the issue of violence and coercion and says there are two ways to fight: “by using laws, and by using force.” (2008: 279) Since the first method—suitable for humans—may not be effective, the second must be resorted to: “as soon as a strong invader enters a region all those there who are not so powerful join with him motivated by their envy of those who have been ruling them.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 113) Thus, the invader think himself superior in winning less powerful men because they will “unite with the state he has conquered,” to be “master of everything in that region.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 113) Be on different wavelengths, the Prince “will quickly lose what he has conquered; even while he holds it he will have countless internal difficulties and problems.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 113)

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler openly endorses and supports the use of force: “I found it difficult to defend my own position: that conflict shouldn’t be avoided but openly confronted, and that we should acquire the arms necessary for protection against violence. Terror cannot be overcome by the mind but only by counter-terror.” (Hitler, 2018: 353) When Hitler talks about his party programs on dealing with non-Germans, the violent temperament is quite apparent. Hitler used violence in an organizational form: Sadist torture of the Gestapo, Nazi concentration camps, specific courts, the regime’s prosecutor’s office, and the enactment of treason laws were some of these methods.

The massacre of “Night of the Long Knives” on 29–30 June 1934 was Hitler’s organizational violence learned by Machiavelli and killed all his opponents in a few nights. (History.com Editors, 2010) Beating communists, Jews, trade unionists, or political opponents ended to a tragedy by organized Fascism.

Referring to “Machiavelli’s ruthless prince,” it is vital to define the origins of “modern totalitarianism” by “reinterpreting the writings of earlier ‘academic scribblers’ in light of the latter-day ‘fruits’ of their theorizing.” (Ball, 2011: 6) Machiavelli was the first philosopher to subdue luck and coincidence with his propaganda to control the events in the future. Machiavelli convinced people by seduction or coercion; to calm people with the weapon of a propaganda campaign launched to remove the guilt of the oppression and keep the people satisfied. To purge the minds of the Prince’s defenders, Machiavelli says the Prince’s ruthlessness, and brutality causes people to feel “simultaneously gratified and terrified.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 167)

Propaganda is the best weapon for intimidating or democratizing; to keep people in control. For Machiavelli, propaganda is different, and it satisfies the people. The wise Prince, for Machiavelli, should adopt this method to convince citizens to support the government and be loyal to him: “an experienced prince ought to contrive methods to force his citizens to need both his government and himself whatever the circumstances: then they will always be loyal to him.” (Machiavelli, 2008: 201) Hitler regrets most warlords who do not believe in the propaganda to turn hell into paradise for their nation: “Only the Jew knew that, by an able and persistent use of propaganda, heaven itself could be presented as hell, and vice versa” (Hitler, 2018: 282) According to him, in any political organization, propaganda takes precedence over any other act. Due to fascist propaganda and Machiavelli’s view, the way to achieve a better life is to eliminate the enemies. The target of propaganda for Machiavelli and Hitler is the masses; any propaganda must be appropriate for the masses. Emphasizing the frequent use of propaganda, Hitler elaborates on using it to achieve goals by the nation in a chapter of *Mein Kampf*. He says, “if Providence had put me in charge of German propaganda, instead of those incompetent and even criminal ignoramuses and scoundrels” (Hitler, 2018: 206), the result could be different; this is the main reason to bring success to “Fatherland.”

5. AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP

For Machiavelli, the state is for the Prince, and he draws the people to the obedience of the state. The Prince’s realization of the state is the first and foremost factor, and the formation of a unified state results from political activity to maintain power for the Prince. The authoritarianism of totalitarian politics and its undisputed domination of other social spheres pits us against the pattern of political autonomy. Due to *The Prince*, a politician’s familiarity with political concepts consciously stops him from focusing on government instead of the ruler. Hitler also criticizes the Kaiser, who was departed from people “with no authority” (Hitler, 2018: 87) to communicate, deponiate the emperor.

For Machiavelli, the way to happiness and perfection is the state, and the government is responsible for prosperity services. However, the critical factor is the leadership of the government. For Machiavelli, the greatness of any nation depends on the implementation of thoughtful and talented brains. In a prosperous nation, talented people lead the people, and power should be delegated for efficient management. Referring to the history of Prussia in ancient times, the commander-in-chief had total power over his subordinates, and their complete obedience to the commander-in-chief was the fundamental principle. Even today, all governments are governed in consultation with parliaments, and the individual's will runs this organization. The government should not follow the majority but rely on advisory groups that are always on the commander-in-chief's side and take orders. If we accept that political leadership supports the manifestation of the public interest, this leadership strengthens to eliminate all potential distractions. Thus, society must be based on the principle of command and obedience to strengthen authority. The organizational structure of fascist parties and governments, based on the authority of the leadership, had a particular function: freedom of action, the absolute authority of the leadership, and the elimination of any possibility of inspecting affairs from the nation.

Machiavelli considers trickery and deception essentially in the game of power: "Machiavelli argues in *The Discourses* that 'fraud' is worthy of praise and glory in warfare when a military leader practices deception in order to win a victory" (Machiavelli, 2008: 65). According to Machiavelli, although everyone admits that the Prince should be righteous and pious, the Prince's life reflects us how he tricked people who has practiced the truth. In the eighteenth chapter, Machiavelli prescribes demagoguery, pretense, and trickery for the Prince. Hitler followed the footsteps of Machiavelli on deception and cunning; so, fraud and the pursue of purpose are the hallmarks of Hitler's attitude. He used all the lies, boasting, deceit, and hypocrisy to achieve his goal. According to Hitler, in the domestic arena, masses must find a guardian for themselves with full conviction and closed eyes and demand the rule and the acceptance of the minority. Fascism takes on a challenging task, which requires democratization and deception of the nation. Hitler found truth as the lie that has been repeated over and over again: "facts and ideas was more lie than truth" (2018: 92)

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler expresses his dissatisfaction due to the policies of a German Duke's government in the 19th century and criticizes him for agreeing with his rivals. (2018: 154) He endorsed the British approach to advance their foreign policy goals and recommended the same to Germany. In his view, the Britanians are an excellent example of conservative people who never do anything they regret. If they do not have bread to eat, they destroy other governments with tricks and snatch bread from others. Hitler says, "We were fighting for our bread; but the English declared that they were fighting for 'freedom' and not even their own freedom." (2018: 176) Hitler considers it a decline of political vision among German diplomats before and after the war. He says, "We didn't have the slightest idea of the essence of that force that causes men to freely and willingly face their own death." (Hitler, 2018: 176)

According to Machiavelli, morality is also vital for maintaining civic virtue or becoming more precise for gaining fame. Machiavelli tests religion and ethics as an instrument and says morality should be subject to the state and national interests. Hence, the morals of subordinates must be determined by the politically powerful who consider the national interest. Machiavelli frees politics from morality, subjugates religion to the state, and makes it an instrument of power. He exempts political leaders from the constant obligation to observe moral rules and advises them to violate these rules to protect their country's interests; however, he does not deny the value and usefulness of ethics to the public. Religion is a factor that brings about social stability and civic virtue; everything should be done to make people follow the right sect seriously. Machiavelli, "in order to embark on greater campaigns," suggests "making use of religion" (Machiavelli, 2008: 333). Machiavelli explicitly states that religiosity is necessary to look religious against the Prince's people because they generally judge everyone based on their observations. In this sense, Nazism must politically suppress socialist, democratic, and liberal institutions and the church above all. Machiavelli's deep and unresolved dispute with the church is a point to discuss for the authoritarian leader. He does not accept any division of power between the state and the church: "Hence when the cardinal told me the Italians had no understanding of warfare, I replied that the French had no understanding of statecraft; for if they had some understanding, they would not have let the church attain such strength." (Machiavelli, 2008: 125)

Machiavelli, in unison with Thucydides, considers war as a natural part of human life. Thucydides "believes that individuals, despite structural forces, are not without choices and they willingly choose going to war" (Dogan, 2004: 67). Machiavelli is personally inclined to the war of aggression as the philosophical defender of militarism. In the twenty-fifth chapter of *The Prince*, he warns the Prince as the fighting spirit of Pope Julius II. (Machiavelli, 2008: 367) Thus, according to Machiavelli, war is essential: the only way for each individual (state) is to be independent. The desire to be free results from domination over others, ending in the war between people and countries. The Prince has to praise the war to keep the throne. For Hitler, militarism, in addition to politics and tactics, was a dominant ideology. Activating the youth and strengthening the spirit of militarism, by all means, is an inevitable necessity. Hitler, like Machiavelli, believed that the only way to liberate human beings was to create lasting and eternal peace, which also required a great war.

CONCLUSION

The Prince by Machiavelli suggests instructions close to the components and elements of the ideology of Fascism—or Nazism that Hitler later addressed in *Mein Kampf*. Machiavelli's emphasis and recommendations, such as hegemony, coercion, propaganda, authoritarian leadership, natural inequality, deception, democratization, abuse of religion, and violent militarism, influenced Hitler. The theory of the government's cycle is a theoretical expression of the turbulent political world that Machiavelli witnessed in Italy and studied in antiquities.

This fact may confirm that historical ideas are repeated. No one can deny the bridge between the thoughts of Machiavelli and Hitler. The conceptual or behavioral analogs offered by thinkers such as Machiavelli are reproduced somehow and under certain conditions in the contemporary world. The practical dimension of Machiavelli's heirs became apparent in totalitarian and fascist movements. Machiavelli's robust and pragmatic politics has transcended the theoretical aspect and entered the realm of politics. The twentieth-century myth faced a fascist school that replaced social charm with natural charm and was applied by leaders such as Hitler under Machiavelli. Machiavelli is unconsciously the partner of Hitler, and in the third millennium, similar fascist ideas are quotable in world politics.

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