

The Heritage of Machiavelli's Ideas in the Context of Modern Politics

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Анализ идейного наследия н. Макиавелли в контексте процессов современной политики

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Abstract: To appeal to Machiavelli's political ethics is to attempt to comprehend and understand the most complex modern political and moral problems through the prism of the theoretical heritage of the philosopher. It is possible to understand clearer modern political processes through his interpretation of the problems of politics and morality, of its ends and means, of power and leadership, wars, freedom, oppression, sovereignty etc. His insight as a philosopher who deeply understands the essence of political processes, and the theory developed by him stepped far forward, and, having extended the timeframe, were able to maintain their universality in the sense of a way of comprehending mores in politics.

Keywords: political ethics, morality and politics, power, political leader, Machiavelli.

Аннотация: Обращение к идеям Н. Макиавелли сегодня является попыткой осмысления современных политических процессов сквозь призму осмысления проблем ограничения власти, критерия блага в политике, защиты от внешних посягательств, необходимости национальной армии, ответственности политика, партий, граждан, свободы как единственного условия истинной гражданственности. Таким образом, анализ идей Макиавелли в современном мире оказывается методологическим разворотом наследия философа.

Ключевые слова: политическая этика, мораль и политика, власть, политический лидер, Макиавелли.

Modern politics is an interweaving of the most difficult processes for analysis, when the tension between positivity and conflicts, clashes and wars has reached such a level that they threaten human civilization as a whole. Political theory and methodology turn out to be unable to cope with their relativism, the exclusive priority of “their” interests, and therefore, in such conditions, in our opinion, it is relevant to turn to the history of political ethics and philosophy. This was pointed out by the Azerbaijani philosopher prof. Ilham Mammadzade in his work *Introduction to Ethics*, in which he notes that political normativity is significant and national interest has normative overtones (2004). A different approach is demonstrated by Quentin Skinner in his book *Machiavelli*. A very brief introduction, in which he considers Machiavelli to be a representative of “... the neoclassical direction of politics in the era of humanism” (Skinner 1981). His approach to the past is determined by the present.

Thus, by developing a meaningful analysis of Machiavelli's theoretical constructions, one can identify cognitive and ideological horizons, reveal the actual state of processes and outline tactics and strategies for achieving an optimistic future. His insight as a philosopher who deeply understands the essence of political processes, the theory he developed stepped far ahead and, having extended the time frame, were able to maintain their universality in the sense of a way to comprehend morals in politics. That is, the comprehension of the problem in the way that he presented it in his works *History of Florence*, *The Prince*, *The Art of War*, *Discourses on Livy* makes it possible to use its temporary cultural outsidersness and methodologically promotes the use of the past experience in a modern context. The search for answers to the questions of limiting power, the criterion of goodness in politics, the protection from external encroachments, the need for a national army, the responsibility of a politician, parties, citizens, freedom as the only condition for true citizenship will inevitably lead us to the legacy of the great philosopher. The analysis of Machiavelli's ideas in the modern world turns out to be a methodological reversal of the heritage of the philosopher himself.

The method of considering politics and the state both as a reality, and as a sphere of due, is the ethical method open to Machiavelli in the study of politics and morality. The thinker established that the historical process do not occur at the will of people, but under the influence of immutable life circumstances, under the influence of “the actual course of the things, not the imaginary one.” And the “real truth of the things” in politics often pushes for the use of violence. It should be noted that there is much violence, clashes, and wars in modern politics. This is a given of the political sphere, which should be limited. However, the limitation mechanism in a certain period often does not work. Therefore, following Machiavelli, we can recognize that it is challenging to follow moral principles when applying the necessary violence, but it is also impossible not to follow because humanity is violated. And in the search of a solution to this contradiction, Machiavelli turns to the concept of common interest. The law and the state should express this interest. Indeed, Machiavelli writes that in

order to save the motherland, preference should be given to that course of action that saves it and preserves freedom. Machiavelli understands that it is impossible to solve both high political goals and lower ones without violence. And here is his first requirement in the methodology of the use of violence, capable of serving high goals: there should be as much violence as necessary and it must be applied immediately and quickly. For violence applied in the way described Machiavelli uses a peculiar term: “merciful cruelty.” It is merciful because it helps prevent more violence: “Cruelty is well applied in those cases – if it is permissible to call evil good, – when it is shown immediately and for reasons of security, without persisting in it and, if possible, turned to the benefit of subjects...” (Machiavelli 1985: 127) Note that the attitude in some of his judgments requires historicism and it is senseless to hold him responsible for political practice and violence, which were like these. Machiavelli proceeds from the fact that no mode of action is wise or bad in itself, regardless of the specific historical situation. The truth is connected with time, but not with eternal truths. The author considers the problem of violence as a means of achieving a political goal not from the point of view of morality or some ideals and principles, but from the point of view of the correct correlation of goals and means in politics. Thus, in the political theory of the philosopher, it is about choosing the right means to achieve lofty goals. Modern politics, as in Machiavelli’s time, is full of clashes and what he associated with the use of violence. But is it limited or merciful? And how should we assess the situation when both conflicting parties refuse to limit the use of violence?

Writing about the negative features of violence, Machiavelli noted the immorality of war. His attitude towards it as an unworthy craft is evidenced by the following statement from the work *The Art of War*: “States, if only they are well-organized, will never allow any of their citizens or subjects to engage in war as a craft, and not a single worthy person will ever won’t make a war. A person who has chosen an occupation that can bring him benefit will never be considered worthy if he turns into a predator, a deceiver and a rapist and develops in himself qualities that must necessarily make him bad... People ...engaged in war as a craft can be only negative ones, since this craft cannot feed them in peacetime. Therefore, they are forced to either strive to ensure that there is no peace, or so profit during the war so that they can be fed when peace comes.” (Machiavelli 2003a: 11) Thus, Machiavelli appears to us as a person who deeply hates war and understands how difficult it is to stop or prevent it.

However, unlike moralists, Machiavelli considers the problem of combining politics and morality by an individual politician, trying to find in political practice the possibility of combining individual decency and honesty with prudence. And for him this is not a question of absolute morality, but of specific political ethics. It should be noted that in modern political clashes, each of the parties to the conflict gives priority to absolute morality, the rightness of the whole party, but not to the political ethics of the leader who decided to enter the war. The morality of a politician should bring results, because otherwise it costs millions of lives and leads to the destabilization of the state. The absolutization of morality in politics, according to Machiavelli,

determines the duration of clashes and wars, and the leader's political ethics as his moral quality limits violence and prudence.

Machiavelli insists on the need to find a new answer to every historical challenge, although the behaviour of a politician may not correspond to the times. That is, if times and conditions change, but the mode of action remains the same, the politician is defeated. Therefore, it is important for a political leader to be able to combine his political ethics and political insight, adherence to principles and prudence, because the question is not about morality, seeking humanity outside of politics, but about the quality of politics itself.

When it comes to combining politics and morality, rationality and values, the question of measure arises. The morality of a political leader is born at the moment of choosing for personal responsibility, and not as a result of the existing system of moral relations. In politics, in the history of responsibility itself, the problem is the definition of the boundaries of this responsibility by a person or a leader. And here the philosopher comes to the following conclusion: a politician cannot have all useful qualities, but he must create an appropriate reputation. He does not oppose “to be” and “seem”, but, Machiavelli writes, virtue must be skilfully and accordingly used. Does it mean to use one or another of one’s spiritual qualities, or only to look like one is endowed with them? The formula “It is important not to be, but to seem” in order to resolve the issue of conflict, first developed by Machiavelli, implies that real personal qualities are no less important than ideas about them than that skilful propaganda effect that would later be called the popular term “image” and would be adopted in all political technologies.

The subordination of political morality not to absolute morality, but to the requirements of calculation, logic and state interest, understood by Machiavelli as the salvation of the motherland, is clearly expressed in the following reasoning: “When it comes to saving the motherland, one should not take into account any considerations about ... what is merciful and what is cruel, ... forgetting everything else, to act in such a way as to save its existence and freedom.” (Machiavelli 2003b: 448)

The state interest, to which political activity is subordinated, is the interest of the people, the national interest. The interests of the people, their welfare, the unity of the people, society and the state, and then national unity – these are the significant political values in the thinker’s system of views. In *The Prince*, which ends with a call to overcome the fragmentation and unite Italy, national unity is put forward in the first place. It is important from the point of view of the internal stability of the state and its protection from external enemies. The unity within the state interested Machiavelli in particular in connection with the problem of security in the face of external enemies. The American political scientist Hans Morgenthau wrote that the modern theory of the national security was developed from the works of the great Florentine (1948). According to Machiavelli, the national security is the security of the people, the state, the territory and the spirit of the people (history). Many politicians and political philosophers consider him the father of political science.

According to Machiavelli, the law and the state express a common interest. Here the philosopher's statement is that, in order to save the state, preference should be given to that course of action that saves it and preserves freedom. That is, it is not only about the presence of a strong army, but about who will be able to use it for its intended purpose. But to use it in the best possible way, a synthesis of knowledge, reason, enterprise and freedom is necessary, which make up together the virtue of a political leader. Machiavelli places full responsibility on the political leader for the position of the state and the armed forces. Machiavelli considered it necessary for every state to create his own armed forces, because without them the state is fragile. Summarizing the historical experience of conducting the state and the military affairs, Machiavelli proposes to abandon the mercenaries and create an army consisting of the state's citizens. The thinker's arguments are aimed at putting the military affairs at the service of the state: "Every well-organized state should therefore set itself the goal that military affairs be only an exercise in peacetime, and in time of war a consequence of necessity and a source of glory." (Machiavelli 2003a: 33). Machiavelli tirelessly repeats the words that have not lost their relevance even today: the best army is the one that consists of its own citizen; only in this way an army should be formed and it must love peace and be able to wage war. These statements give reason to consider Machiavelli a supporter of peace and harmony between peoples, because he recognized the conduct of hostilities only in case of historical necessity.

The American researcher John Pocock called "the moment of Machiavelli" any historical period when the state is faced with a situation of temporary instability, when, during social turbulence, citizens go through a process of self-knowledge in order to find ways to effectively establish political, social harmony in the face of a stream of irrational chaotic negative events (1975). The "moment of Machiavelli" for sovereign Azerbaijan of the 21st century ended with the restoration of its territorial integrity, the establishment of international law and the national dignity of the Azerbaijani people, ensuring the security and well-being of the people, choosing in favour of the freedoms of civil society, asserting self-awareness and understanding of state and social values of modernity, independent domestic and foreign policy and peace in the region. This is the moment of the truth.

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