

Hobbes

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Thomas Hobbes and Nicollo Machiavelli had different views on the role of politic in the society, but their thoughts and theoretical approaches are still relevant in the contemporary political scene. Hobbes mostly focused on the concept of power and the role of consent in legitimizing power. On the other hand, Machiavelli simply assumed that power exists, and Machiavelli's concern is on how power politics comes into play. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli sought to expound on his political philosophy through seeking what he termed as the truth. Hobbes concept on the state of nature appears imaginary in comparison to Machiavelli's thoughts and wittings. This paper delves into how Thomas Hobbes Leviathan state is similar and different from Machiavelli's principalities and republics.

Machiavelli

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli stated that principalities could come about either as new entities or through heredity. However, Machiavelli went to state that principalities brought about by hereditary were easier to hold on to; as such, a principality would already be accustomed to being ruled by the same family¹. In other words, an heir to the throne is more likely to hold onto power for long unless an extraordinary event results to power shift. Machiavelli further supposes that in the event that the rightful heir is relieved of power, then this would simply be temporary, as power would revert to the rightful person. Thus, the heir to power needs not offend people to be powerful, and not unless he provokes the people through carelessness then there is likelihood that he would be a popular power broker.

Leviathan state and principality

¹ Machiavelli, N. *The Prince*. Trans. by Jonathan Bennett, (2010), 2

Machiavelli divided states into either a republic or a principality, but Hobbes viewed states as either being formed through agreement or force. Both a principality and state has sovereignty over the people being governed, but the differences emerge on how the two view the issue of power². To Machiavelli ruling through hereditary power, best serves the interests of the people, and Hobbes prefers monarchy to a republic because of the view that sovereignty should not be divided³. Thus, a strong state is either ruled when the ruling authorities have undivided sovereignty in governing over states and principalities. Consequently, Hobbes focus on sovereignty has similarities to Machiavelli's views on power.

The similarity between Leviathan state and Machiavelli principality is on the manner of power acquisition. Both entities arise out of the need to govern, while also having some form of control within a specific geographical boundary. The most apparent similarity is that both viewed acquisition by a force as an alternative. However, Hobbes has a more positive view on forceful acquisition even when people may initially oppose this kind of acquisition. In case that people do not resist then the sovereign holds control over the subjects. Equally, peace would only prevail if the sovereign becomes the source of power and knowledge. Machiavelli viewed forceful acquisition of power as being dangerous for the rulers, as those helping him typically have their own agenda.⁴ According to Machiavelli, power acquisition in a foreign land should be seen to empower the weak, and should weaken the powerful for the ruler to remain powerful.

Hobbes focused on monarchy systems more than democratic systems of ideal state based on his views about sovereignty and state of nature. The monarchy system is in fact a principality,

² Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, Renaissance edition. USA: University of Oregon, (1999), 78

³ Ibid 2

⁴ Machiavelli, N. *The Prince*. Trans. by Jonathan Bennett, (2010), 5

whereby the monarchy is the source of authority⁵. Hobbes lays emphasis on the monarchy because it seems as the natural form of authority unlike democracy or aristocracy, which were artificial systems of authority. Thus, Hobbes view in the Leviathan show that he also favored principalities as the natural order of things. However, the origin of monarchies may have been preceded by democracy, but his emphasis on sovereignty is an extension of the notion of power as absolute. To Hobbes power needed to be undivided for states to enjoy more sovereignty.

Leviathan state and republic

During Machiavelli's time, the republic represented a government system in a state where people had the right to nominate elected officials. To Hobbes, people were inherently selfish and greedy to the extent that they cannot be expected to legitimately form governments. Thus, to avoid this problem, it is essential to have to limit the free state of nature before creating communities. In essence, Hobbes supposed that freedom would result to infighting through struggle for power and wealth. Hobbes view on a social contract in a state of nature requires submission to a higher authority, but Machiavelli did not expound on republics in *The Prince*. Machiavelli viewed republics as being ineffective in public administration in contrast to princely rule, but like Hobbes he saw republics as alternative forms of administration.

A government by state of nature is in fact ruling through force, and Hobbes had a negative view on rights accorded to individuals in a state. In essence, it is difficult for people to give up their rights, and sovereignty would only arise when people gave up their rights to an authority. Similarly, people would have to give up their rights in cases of princely rule, as princely rule would emerge dominant over republics. Machiavelli thoughts on republics were

⁵ Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, Renaissance edition. USA: University of Oregon, (1999), 8

negative, because he stated that any strong former republic would have to be eliminated to give chance for princely rule. Thus, both Hobbes and Machiavelli sought to downplay the relevance of republics in the political sphere, but their reasons for this view were divergent.

Even though, Hobbes stated that the ruled gave up some of their rights for the betterment of the society, this would not entirely result to autocracy. In essence, after some time they would be stability, safety and people would gain wealth. Thus, people would then regain freedom and rights over time, after initially ceding them to a legitimate authority. Hobbes thoughts also capture the notion that individual rights and equality are essential in the long run. Hobbes thoughts on individual rights indicate that a republic was an ideal state so long as there was prolonged security. However, this view contrasted with that of Machiavelli who preferred the return of principalities in place of republics⁶.

Differences between the Prince and Leviathan

Hobbes viewed human beings as being irrational because they can act on impulse, and in the state of nature there is little authority as people can do anything they want because they are no defined rights. Nonetheless, through a social contract all people must surrender sovereignty to a person or group of person through a democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy. However, Machiavelli, holds a differ opinion on governance, as shown by his preoccupation with princely rule. In other words, Hobbes is willing to consider both principalities and republics as having sovereign power over the ruled. On the other hand, Hobbes, does not take into account the issue of sovereignty, but assumes that principalities would automatically transfer authority to the ruler/ prince.

⁶ Machiavelli, N. *The Prince*. Trans. by Jonathan Bennett, (2010), 1

One of the major differences between the two philosophers is on how to capture and maintain power. Even though, their ideas came about because of chaos brought about by war⁷, they do not agree on the manner in which to restore order in the society. Hobbes is preoccupied with sovereignty being most important factor for a leader in a state. However, Hobbes sees power as the ultimate goal of a prince, who should prioritize on how to capture and maintain this power. Thus, Machiavelli analyzed power from an aristocratic angle where princes inherit power and use their legitimacy for their own benefit⁸.

Another divergent view between Hobbes and Machiavelli is that Hobbes states that power emanates from sovereignty. Thus, this view holds that even when the sovereign reigns over the ruled it is still subject to the people because it derives sovereignty from the power given by the citizens. This contrast sharply, with principalities where princes automatically have legitimacy with sovereignty playing a minor role in these principalities. In any case, Hobbes view on ceding power to the sovereign does not equate to dictatorship, because it is the result of a social contract. In essence, the state agrees to protect citizens as an exchange for citizens giving up their rights.

⁷ Hobbes, T. *Leviathan*, Renaissance edition. USA: University of Oregon, (1999), 14

⁸ Machiavelli, N. *The Prince*. Trans. by Jonathan Bennett, (2010), 7

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