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Enlightenment and Its Critics

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<div align="center">A Cooperative and Peaceful Civil Union: Practical or Quixotic?</div>

Niccolò Machiavelli's didactic and revolutionary political treatise, *The Prince,* and

Immanuel Kant's intriguing yet controversial essays, "Idea for a Universal History with a

Cosmopolitan Purpose," and "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment,'"

contemplate how the relationship between the rulers and their respective subjects influences

domestic affairs. Kant insists that individuals should employ reason rather than ignorance to

emerge out of "self-incurred immaturity" without committing actions that might cause

disruptions in the society (Kant 54). On the other hand, Machiavelli devises a treatise in which

he describes how a ruler should maintain an ordered society. While one offers social order

through the assistance of the citizens, the other provides the ruler instructions to achieve the

same objective. Altogether, Machiavelli utilizes logic and structure, along with historical

examples to convey his revolutionary ideas, while Kant exposes human nature by warning

against the conflict of individuality and collective good to stretch the boundaries of human

programmability in order to eradicate disorder and turmoil in society.

Machiavelli utilizes his discourse to the Prince as a template to demonstrate to the rulers

how to maintain order, expose their flaws, and warn the citizens to resist unjust rulers by

defending their own rights. He divides the chapters in a logical manner by exploring "the

different kinds of principalities and how they are acquired," "how one should govern" them, and

offers numerous advice and warnings (Machiavelli 5, 17). Machiavelli breaks down his political

treatise into simple statements of causes and effects similar to programming code filled with if-else statements. For example in chapter II, he claims that if a principality is hereditary, then the ruler only has to be "ordinarily diligent and competent" to be successful (6). If the rule is not gained hereditarily, the chapter does not apply to the respective reader. Similarly, he carefully defines the steps needed to be taken if a mixed principality is acquired.   A ruler can only escape the woes of conquering a small territory of loyal citizens if the new ruler "wipe[s] out their old ruling families" and does not "change their laws or impose new taxes" (8). If these two cases do not apply, then the only other prominent governance issues will occur after conquering a former republic because their citizens tend to have "greater vitality" and a "stronger desire for revenge" (19). He implies that, overall, only three major cases of civic rule are possible—principality, republic, and anarchy. The distinct yet structured form of instruction clearly demonstrates how Machiavelli utilizes written text as an instrument to spread his ideas in an extremely logical manner.

Along with structural effectiveness, Machiavelli embeds historical support to emphasize his fundamental theories. For example, he employs the contrary figures of the futile Caesar Borgia, better known as Duke Valentino, and the tyrannical Agothocles to demonstrate the differences between an unsuccessful, yet noble ruler and a temporarily successful, yet immoral dictator. The writer states that even though Valentino's efforts eventually turned out to be fruitless, he personified "great spirit" and "high ambitions," which is why is he should be "held up as a model" rather than criticized (Machiavelli 28). On the other hand, Agothocles's dynamic rise to power should not be generalized as a symbol of eminence because his murderous reign was based on "treacherous, merciless, and irreligious" deeds (31). These historical comparisons provide Machiavelli a basis from which he derives several conclusions in the later chapters that

characterize his set of ideals as "Machiavellian." One of the central tenets of his philosophy revolves around the idea of the equilibrium of love and fear and if it is impossible to attain, then "it is much safer to be feared than to be loved," without being hated (59). In addition, he professes that although a ruler should be "exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout," he or she should be able to embark on the "path of wrongdoing when this becomes necessary" (62). The conclusions based on thoughtful deliberation evident in Machiavelli's writing correlate with the analytical mindset of computer scientists. They utilize programming applications as a means of solving certain problems in the most efficient way possible. Similarly, Machiavelli utilizes his political treatise to explore solutions to the question of resolving societal unrest. He takes a problem every society faces, examines each possible case separately, analyzes their pros and cons, offers alternatives, provides specific examples, and constructs a guideline for the ruler to implement his theories into actions. Deriving conclusions through specific examples formed on a fluid structure illustrates why Machiavelli's ideas are so effective on leaders like the Prince across all generations throughout the world.

Contrasting Machiavelli's method, Kant's approach emphasizes the responsibilities of the citizens to accomplish the same task of keeping social order. He proclaims that it is important to reason against the societal problems as long as it is done within the realms of order. Kant's philosophy states that arguing against authority is necessary but "obedience is imperative" as well (Kant 56). He reasons that an individual should challenge society through writing and persuasion and not by civil disobedience against the "guardians" of society like the church or king. Unlike Machiavelli, Kant does not present a detailed list of steps to follow. Instead, he warns individuals that although the Enlightenment ideas of questioning and reasoning are essential, they should be implemented in a controlled manner. He warns the public of hasty

revolutions, "dogmas and formulas," and "laziness and cowardice" (54). Instead of instructing mankind of their duties and responsibilities, Kant cautions the people to guard against possible obstacles. All in all, while addressing the topic of Enlightenment, Kant encourages contained reasoning to prompt individuals to think liberally while acting conservatively.

In his essay on universal history, Kant proposes that the best way to preserve law and order is through "unsocial sociability" (Kant 44). He focuses on two sides of the spectrum—the individual and the society. Individuals have a desire to "produce everything by themselves" while humanity in general is "meant to develop its capacities completely" (46). The "unsocial sociability" phrase implies that citizens should sacrifice self-development and curb their temptations for the betterment of society, which will eventually create a "perfect civil union" (51). Furthermore, in his sixth proposition, Kant affirms that although man is characterized by the desire for "unrestrained freedom," he should be able to enter the "state of restriction by sheer necessity" (46). Subsequently, the society will see the "most beneficial effect" in this manner (46). This is a direct comparison with Machiavelli. While Machiavelli claimed it is vital for the ruler to be able to do wrong for the sake of his subjects, Kant proclaims it is important for citizens to curb his or her own desires for the benefit of the society. Kant's argument directs individuals to practice their freedom without constraints as long as they not infringe on someone else's freedom. Although Kant is not as explicit as Machiavelli in the terms of providing instructions for every situation, he does present warnings for impediments that one might encounter. Individuals should reason as it is their human right to do so. They should utilize innate human desires for self-development, not for societal disruption. If change is to occur, it has to occur through peaceful and gradual means. Practicing freedom is a natural right, but it should not be valued at the expense of societal peace. These are the guidelines Kant offers to

successfully instruct common individuals how they should act in order to promote the welfare of the general public.

Although Machiavelli and Kant achieve their goals through the means of writing, the combination of the two philosophies can create a unique template to achieve tranquility. Although a guideline is provided, the realization of peace is based on the actions and judgment of each individual. If the rulers do their necessary part to keep society together and the citizens ensure harmonious cooperation, law and order can be maintained. Even though a seemingly fluid structure is provided by these two great thinkers, chaos is still prevalent in society. The failure of social order to follow a specific template lies in human nature's own fallibility. Humans disrupt logic. This is why longing for a peaceful world by hoping that every individual and nation-states follow sensible judgment is impractical. The tension that develops between individual freedom and the collective good has been historically prevalent, and its cause is deeply rooted in the corruption of rulers and the self-centeredness of citizens. They both yearn for an ordered society, but neither is willing to renounce personal freedom for society's advancement. Major power struggles are not necessarily caused by antagonism between rulers and the common man; instead, they are fought between the rulers with their lust for power and the common man with his internal desires. As Desiderius Erasmus states in his masterpiece, *Complaint of Peace*, "one and the same man is at war with himself," which is the root of all social conflicts (Erasmus 94). If people are not content with themselves, then the initial internal conflict contributes to the creation of external conflicts, which causes an endless cycle of social turmoil. Although enlightening texts provide optimism for a peaceful society, the fickle nature of human logic causes this hope to become a quixotic dream instead.

Kant's essays provoke a possible solution to this complex problem. Individuals should live in two spheres—the individual and the societal—separately. Although these spheres do intersect, there is a unique aspect to each of them as well. An individual should be able to develop adequately with unrestrained freedom, while internal honesty should prevent him or her from committing injustice. These two spheres are interrelated, but when they collide, they do not have to produce a negative consequence. Man can fully develop on an individual basis, contribute to the society, and help maintain its peace at the same time. One should not have to limit individuality for the sake of social order—both should be attainable. Similarly, Machiavelli states that although the ruler should be well respected, he should not acquire hatred. As a ruler, he is bound to live in multiple spheres, but he can attempt to maintain moral judgment and peace. Although Machiavelli asserts that a ruler should be able to indulge in wrongdoing when it becomes an absolute necessity, he or she should not habitually delve into this malpractice. If individuals develop themselves and provide for the common good separately, and the rulers are righteous and respected, together, they are capable of avoiding infringement on individual liberty and elevating the status of their social order.

The flaws of human nature highlight the obstacles hindering an otherwise transparent approach to public peace. If human logic complies, so will the human behavior associated with it. If the logic is frequently disrupted, then no matter how influential the political treatise or introspective the essays, society will continue to confront friction and disunity. Through Kant's warnings of an individual's social struggle and Machiavelli's detailed list of instructions hoping for a more efficient rule, it is evident that human programmability is indeed impossible. Even though these two thinkers develop a transparent mechanism for a harmonious society, human fallibility causes civil conflicts nevertheless. The turmoil spreads and generates a chaotic

reaction, which constructs an unceasing cycle. Therefore, although world renowned thinkers and leaders might attempt to guide new generation of leaders and civilians with their empirical knowledge to protect law and order, it will not be accomplished unless both parties compromise, cooperate, and renounce some individual desires. Perfection is unobtainable, and devising a perfect system is even less attainable, and therefore, these writings should only be viewed as "guidelines" and not absolute truth.

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