

Niccolo Machiavelli and the Possibility of the Post-political

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Abstract

In an essay written in 2009, Romualdo E. Abulad asked: “[p]hilosophy and politics: do they meet and mix?” Apparently, it would take one to read the entire essay to find out the writer’s answer to his question. One would also need to read through the circuitous explanations and examples without the assurance of getting a clear-cut yes or no for an answer. This paper engages Abulad’s philosophical musings on politics, specifically his interpretation of Niccolo Machiavelli. Additionally, and because of my discontent with Abulad’s presentation, this paper asks the same question raised in his essay: “do philosophy and politics mix?” I take the liberty of adding another question and thus expanding the discussion: how possible is a post-political situation or choice in one’s existence?

Keywords: *Post-political, Machiavellianism, Post-Machiavelli, Political Thought*

Niccolo Machiavelli: Portal to the Political

In trying to answer the question “do philosophy and politics mix”, Romualdo E. Abulad opens his discussion with these words on Niccolo Machiavelli:

What is politics? Again, here is a question which needs an answer – and the answer may come randomly from any legitimate source. As the one trying to provide such an answer, I shall naturally be coming from where I would like to begin, and that is with the man reputedly political par

excellence, none other than the fifteenth century intellectual, Niccolo Machiavelli.¹

By describing Machiavelli as a man “reputedly political par excellence” Abulad implies that the Italian political philosopher best represents quotidian politics: messy, corrupt, and unendingly deceitful.² In his own words:

For his blunt, honest, and sympathetic depiction of the political prince, we owe Niccolo Machiavelli more than a dint of solid thanks. What his masterwork is all about is the political mind at its best, politics par excellence, and it is necessary to understand this paragon of the political if we are to grasp the status of our times as postmodernity, that is, as post-Machiavelli.³

Apparently, Abulad is not alone in his reading of Machiavelli. It is a rather common view that the Renaissance political thinker is a proponent of practical or *real* politics. Along this line, politics is conceptualized as dismissive of ethics or morality, subordinating the latter to the former. Machiavelli’s reputation as an architect who provides an evil blueprint for all political practitioners, both successful and aspiring, is one that has gone

¹ Romualdo Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics: Do they Mix?” *Phavisminda Journal*, vol. 8 (2009): 1. Henceforth, this essay shall be cited as “Philosophy and Politics.” In his other essay “Post-Machiavelli”, Abulad says: “For his blunt, honest and sympathetic depiction of the political prince, we owe Niccolo Machiavelli more than a dint of solid thanks. What his masterwork is all about is the political mind at its best, politics par excellence, and it is necessary to understand this paragon of the political if we are to grasp the status of our times as postmodernity, that post-Machiavelli.” See Romualdo E. Abulad, “Post-Machiavelli,” Romulado E. Abulad and Alfredo P. Co, *Two Filipino Thomasian Philosophers on Postmodernism* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 2004), 94.

² Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 1. He adds: “What makes the position of Machiavelli problematic is a subtle point which, again, Levinas is able to see, smartly detecting the political stance which reduces everything into a war opposed to all morality, which even abandons morality altogether when this is found convenient.” *Ibid.*, 2.

³Abulad, “Post-Machiavelli”, 94. As mentioned, we need to substantiate the analysis and contention that for Abulad, Machiavelli is the image of politics and thus the political. Hence, the need to also read his “Post-Machiavelli”, an essay compiled with other essays. It is Abulad’s attempt to *deconstruct* politics that is conceptualized, defined, and practiced in Machiavellian terms. In Abulad’s words, “Post-Machiavelli implies not as much abandoning him as transcending him, that is, so mastering him as to see his breaking point or, in Derridean lingo, to deconstruct him.” *Ibid.*, 97-98.

beyond him and his writings. An article in *Psychology Today* speaks about Machiavellianism as follows:

In psychology, Machiavellianism refers to a personality type that does not choose to be, but simply is, a master manipulator. Machiavellians (or “High Machs”; see below) do not need to read *The Prince* to acquire a knack for duplicity. They are temperamentally predisposed to be calculating, conniving, and deceptive.⁴

This sample article on Machiavelli allows us to understand where Abulad comes from, and why he asks about the possible compatibility (“mix” in his own words) of politics and philosophy. It gives us an idea why Abulad speaks about “beyond Machiavelli” that is the transcendence of egocentric politics which the Italian Renaissance philosopher symbolizes.⁵

But is this reading correct?

Abulad’s reading of Machiavelli

Machiavelli’s prince is described by Abulad as “rather out of date and asking for some repair.”⁶ Accordingly, he represents the political man, the politician, or the practitioner of politics par excellence. The quoted statement suggests that Machiavelli’s view and notion of politics is essentially problematic and thus the necessity for a deconstruction. This position is not difficult to understand based on Abulad’s interpretation of Machiavelli. According to Abulad “the foundation of Machiavelli’s view of politics is power and war which is opposed to morality.”⁷ He supports his position with citations from *The Prince*, specifically chapters VII: concerning new principalities acquired with the arms and fortunes of others, XII:

⁴ Dale Hartley, “Meet the Machiavellians,” *Psychology Today*, Sept 8/2015. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/machiavellians-gulling-the-rubes/201509/meet-the-machiavellians> (accessed September 15, 2020).

⁵ Abulad, “Post-Machiavelli”, 100

⁶ Ibid., 100.

⁷ Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 2-3

concerning various kinds of troops, and especially mercenaries, XIII: concerning auxiliary, mixed, and native forces, and XIV: a prince's concern in military matters.

In Abulad's interpretation, the strategic advice in *The Prince* is focused on war and the reduction of everything into it. Invoking Emmanuel Levinas, the Italian thinker is criticized, thus: "[w]hat makes the position of Machiavelli problematic is a subtle point which, again, Levinas is able to see, smartly detecting the political stance which reduces everything into a war opposed to all morality, which even abandons morality altogether when this is found convenient."⁸ Moreover, Abulad interprets Machiavelli's suggestion on the importance of princes' education on war as politics that is too focused on power. Specifically cited to support this are the advices in chapter XIV of *The Prince* "[princes] must have no other objective, no other thought, nor take up any other profession but that of war, its methods, and its discipline, for that is the only art expected of a ruler"⁹ and that in chapter XVIII, in which it is suggested that princes know how to use both law and force as a means of fighting but that in the end force must still be used because of the insufficiency of the law.¹⁰

[A] Machiavelli and Thrasymachus

In light of the foregoing points, Abulad likens Machiavelli's position to that of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, who defends the rule of the strong man.¹¹ Thus, Machiavelli is described as someone who "slyly favors" evil if "this will make the prince succeed in his main business which is to stay in power."¹²

⁸ Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics", 3.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XIV, 53-54

¹⁰ Ibid., XVIII

¹¹ Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics", 3. For reference on the comparison of Machiavelli to Thrasymachus see Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H.D.P. Lee (England: Penguin, 1967), 96-97; cf. footnote 12 of Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics."

¹² Ibid., 3

Another point of similarity between Machiavelli and Thrasymachus is their approval of deception. Though Abulad agrees to the former's advice to princes to be cunning, and thus recognize snares and wolves and strategically deal with them, he is critical of the advice that if the prince does not have the qualities, he must 'seem' to have them. In Abulad's interpretation, this is an example of Machiavelli's false dichotomy of seeming and being, that is, between appearance and reality. Abulad likens Machiavelli to Thrasymachus who is unable to overcome the dichotomy between the forms and the shadows.¹³ In the context of this interpretation, politics is associated with the intelligible world (shadows) while ethics or morality is impliedly associated with the world of forms. At the risk of stretching our interpretation, it may be argued that what Abulad is trying to say is that politics, as it is practiced, ought to be played based on the principles of morality and ethics if it is to be freed from the quagmire of deceptions.

[B] *Machiavelli and Hobbes*

Another political philosopher whom Abulad likens to Machiavelli is Thomas Hobbes. The relation and comparison are not difficult to understand. Basically, Hobbes is contrasted to John Locke who has a more positive take on human nature. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes explains that the state of nature is a state of war.¹⁴ Without the state, human existence would be a condition of continual fear, and danger, and violent death, and therefore solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.¹⁵ This is precisely the reason why Abulad describes both political theorists as pessimistic in their view of human nature. Thus they both "end up clamoring for the same type of government that is a totalitarian rule."¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁴ Hobbes writes that without law or restraint, humanity would live in a miserable condition of warfare. The condition of war is "necessarily consequent to the naturall Passions of men, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe, and tye them by feare of punishment to the performance of their Covenants, and observation of those Lawes of Nature..." (Original spelling retained). See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 223. Specifically cf. Part II (Of Commonwealth), Chapter XVII (Of the Causes, Generation, and Definition of a Common-Wealth.)

¹⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIII.

¹⁶ Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics", 6.

Citing Hobbes' description of the state of nature in which man is a wolf to all other men, Abulad interprets the English philosopher's political vision (of the state) as one that is dictatorial. He associates the depiction of the mighty ruler in the frontispiece of the *Leviathan*, whose body subsumes all the individuals composing the commonwealth – with the governments or the states of Tibet or Myanmar or even Russia or China. This line on tyranny basically and apparently evidences what is here discussed as the association of Hobbes with tyranny:

Is the tyrant, consciously or unconsciously, the ideal political man? Perhaps no person of today in his right mind will answer this question in the affirmative, and yet it isn't this actually the logical conclusion of the premises of Thrasymachus, Hobbes and Machiavelli.¹⁷

We shall not comment, at this point, on Abulad's interpretation of Machiavelli and Hobbes, which apparently lumps the two political philosophers into one without nuance or qualification. A few words as a way of critique will be said about this later. For now, it is enough to underscore that: using Hobbes' position on (1) man's state of nature as evil, (2) the depiction of the state as a *Leviathan*, and (3) the importance of force as a means to implement political obligation, Abulad reinforces his position on Machiavelli as a political philosopher par excellence who espouses practical politics described and understood as the reduction of all political relations to war. As this line from the essay explains: “[i]f, then, power is all that counts for a politician, and if ultimate power is absolute, then the ideal of a political man is absolute power, which is what dictatorship and tyranny are all about.”¹⁸

A Proposed Post-Machiavellianism

As a tentative summary of the foregoing, and as a way to open this segment of the discussion, the following points are noteworthy: [A] the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

proposed post-Machiavellianism is a critique of Machiavelli's notion of politics and governance which presupposes that the human person is evil; [B] post-Machiavellianism requires that we interrogate or critique Machiavelli's presupposition and thereby purify his thought to bring about an ethical perspective or reading of politics; [C] consequently and in light of A and B, it is possible to speak of strategy, management or even political play past the egoistic politics of Machiavelli.

The question at this point is whether Abulad is successful in the post-Machiavellian approach to his own question regarding politics and philosophy, and whether the notion of *management* or *strategy* which he has in mind is, at all, a departure from Machiavelli and thus of politics.

[A] Can there be politics, and thus leadership or management without power?

What has been presented as an interpretation of Machiavelli must be clear at this point. He is identified with Thrasymachus and Hobbes, and Abulad reads all of them as political thinkers who believe that politics as a human activity aims at the acquisition and maintenance of power, thus privileging force or even war over ethics and virtue. Their position as has been presented is problematic. In the words of Abulad: “[t]here is something shaky about power as an ultimate goal. It needs constant watch, or else it can slip through one’s grasp without one’s being aware of it.”¹⁹ However, just a few sentences after this line, he asks:

What if he converts his goal to something other than power at any cost, so that he begins to care less about his positions and more about, say, virtue? Then, he will no longer be a politician in the mold of Machiavelli. If we will equate politics with Machiavellian politics, we will then be going beyond what truly deserves to be called politics. One is no longer a politician, but something else. What else? Perhaps a leader

¹⁹ Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 8

transcending politics, one like Christ or Gandhi, or at least like Peter Drucker, the management guru.²⁰

Before any comment on or analysis of the quoted portion, an observation is deemed necessary at this point. Apparently, Abulad is not dismissive of political leadership; he speaks about goal, position, strategy, and management. Here, one should realize that there is a missing link. There is an apparent shift from (Machiavellian) politics as centered on power to the possibility of a leadership that does not think of power as an ultimate goal or end. Abulad critiques the power-based politics and political strategy and approach of Machiavelli, but in the succeeding part of the discussion, he talks about leading without having power in mind (on the part of the leader) as the goal but virtue. The missing link is best expressed through this question: how possible is it to think of leadership or even management (and ultimately politics) without power?

[B] Transcending Machiavelli? Or Purifying Him?

In his other essay, “Post-Machiavelli,” which essentially carries the same theme “Philosophy and Politics: Do they Mix?” Abulad speaks of his objective which is: to arrive at a “post-Machiavellian” theory that transcends - not necessarily abandon Machiavelli. This means mastering Machiavelli to see his breaking point or, in a Derridean lingo, a deconstruction of Machiavelli. This means in elaborate terms: to go “[b]eyond Machiavelli” and his egocentric basis, and thus see a whole set of nuances which, “though not murderous of Machiavelli” but alters drastically the picture of the Prince, and thus make Machiavelli’s Prince rather out of date and needs repair.

It is clear at this point that what is meant by going beyond (transcending not abandoning in Abulad’s words) Machiavelli is: (1) not using Machiavelli’s (together with Hobbes) presupposition on the evil nature of the human person, and (2) Machiavelli is correct in the need to strategize politically but only for the right reason and with the good intention (virtuous

²⁰ Ibid.

strategizing). In this light, what must be transcended is that kind of politics that is corrupt and evil. Yet, the question remains, can we go beyond politics? Can we have a politics that is not concerned with power; can there be leaders, strategists, or managers who would lead and manage in the spirit of virtuousness without any regard or concern for power?

It can be said without necessarily pre-empting the conclusion that Abulad's post-Machiavellianism is the purification of Machiavelli. It is a dream of a benevolent politics. This is clear in his ideation that things can be managed but not necessarily politicized and that the leader need not be shrewd, deceitful, pretentious, and cruel but rather virtuous, adaptable, and prudent. In trying to prove his point, Abulad speaks of leadership as becoming like a saint who is a "fool in relation to ordinary human expectations" and thus needs "a lot of shifting forms to avoid getting entrapped in the usual social norms."²¹ He further adds, "Like any spirit of genius, the saint is an original who gains victory through the narrow way, where the ultimate deception consists in looking like a fool, Christ's fool in this particular case, which is really ultimately the smart way – to be meek as lamb but wise as a serpent."²²

The use of the archetype or the symbol of the saint suggests a kind of leadership or management that is virtuous thus free from egoism. "Where there is still any vestige of ego or self, the explosion is yet incomplete, the bursting continues until such a time when nothingness is literally itself, that is, nothing."²³ The ego which is associated with greed, selfishness, self-interest and whatever is antithetical to virtue are the sources of desire for

²¹ Abulad, "Post-Machiavelli", 102. See his usage of the Biblical Jesus as an example of this kind of saintly leadership in Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics", 12. In his words: "The best example we have of such a good man is, unquestionably the Biblical Jesus who has shown in life and death how it is to be smart and outwit every malicious enemy without much trying." For reference, cf. the Gospel passages cited: Mark 11: 27-33, Mark 12: 13-17).

²² Abulad, "Post-Machiavelli", 102. In Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics", 13, the wordings are: "It is interesting what Jesus says to his disciples, 'I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves' (Mt. 10:16). There is nowhere he advises his missionaries to go down to the beastly level."

²³ Abulad, "Post-Machiavelli", 98

power, war, and thus the kind of politics defined and understood as Machiavellian or Hobbesian. “This ego or self is the same ground that sustains Machiavelli’s Prince, the rational power for politics and the meaning of the survival sought for by him who needs to secure himself by any means.”²⁴ A later essay, presented in 2017, substantiates this earlier position of Abulad. He tries to justify martial law in the face of rumors that President Duterte would invoke military power, thus: “[a]nd so, can martial law go hand in hand with morality and religion? Why not, in case of invasion or rebellion, when the public safety requires it?” [He adds] “There is a difference between Marcos and Duterte” [because] “Marcos desecrated the constitution by violating its very spirit when he used it to justify the prolongation of his rule . . .”²⁵

Abulad’s position in 2017 affirms an earlier position articulated in the two essays I have discussed earlier. He believes that we have to go beyond Machiavelli, that is, of corrupt and bad politics but not necessarily the need for control and order. Thus, in my reading of his position, controlling people is not essentially or basically evil; it becomes one if it is done for evil motives and not for the greater good. Further, disciplining people is not necessarily bad politics, in fact, it is an act of leadership that flows from virtue, a management that does not think of the self but of the greater good. Accordingly, politics is not (the same with) “competent management.”²⁶ Precisely why it is possible to speak of Lee Kuan Yew as a dictator but not a tyrant.²⁷ Abulad explicates the matter by differentiating strategy or management from politics. His case in point is Sun Tzu, known for his *The Art of War*, whom Abulad considers as an alternative to Machiavelli and his power-centered and politically oriented strategy.²⁸ The argument is further

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Romualdo Abulad, “Martial Law and Religion,” *Scientia*, Vol. VI, no. 2 (2017), 53-54.

²⁶ Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 2

²⁷ Ibid., 7

²⁸ Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 14. To quote Abulad: “[w]here politics is after the enemy’s head, management aims at having the work or mission done and victory achieved.” Further, “the consummation of forming an army is to arrive at formlessness,” Sun Tzu declares, “when you have no form, undercover espionage cannot find out anything, intelligence cannot form a strategy . . . Competent leadership is flexible and is

stretched by relating the discussion on management to the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus Christ, whose leadership style Abulad describes as "extremely subtle" to the point of becoming "the director of the opponent's fate."²⁹ His invocation of such Christological leadership is used to solidify his point: precisely why management is not politics because "the latter is about being after the opponent's head while the former aims at the work or mission done and victory achieved."³⁰ Management which becomes concrete in "competent leadership" is "flexible and is able to maneuver things effectively according to existing conditions."³¹

Machiavelli, Politics, and Modern Political Thought

The foregoing discussion has presented a kind of interpretation of Niccolo Machiavelli within the context of the author's exploration for an answer to the question: does philosophy mix with politics? This question, again, is the focus of this paper and shall be treated before the conclusion.

However, before proceeding to the treatment of the said question, I find it imperative to ask if Abulad interpreted Machiavellian political philosophy correctly? Is it really the case that Machiavelli's political thought or theory has little or no regard for morality?

It is unfortunate to say that in his effort to deconstruct Machiavelli, Abulad simplified his reading of the Italian political thinker (and even Hobbes). In fact, it would not be unfair to say that Machiavelli was not fairly read by being described as someone mainly concerned with power and favorable of the strong, and thus a consenter of all evil plays in politics. The most unfair part of the reading is the reduction of the Italian political thinker to an archetype of all that is deceitful in politics. Machiavelli may have been

able to 'maneuver things' (my emphasis) effectively according to existential conditions. With reason and virtue, a person, a leader for that matter, may proceed dealing and relating with people guided by "formlessness."

²⁹ Ibid., 13-14.

³⁰ Ibid., 14

³¹ Ibid.

associated with practical politics, that is, the ‘is’ of politics rather than the ‘ought’; nevertheless, this is not an entirely accurate interpretation. One has to read Machiavelli, especially *The Prince*, in context, and additionally, one has to read the other writings of the Italian political thinker in order to get the fulsome landscape of his views. Precisely, Machiavelli’s thought is not devoid of a moral perspective. Neither is it correct to say that it merely serves as a blueprint for self-preservation, and thus of selfish interest.³²

Apparently, Machiavelli is not like Aristotle who is explicit in his view on the link between ethics and politics. More so he is not the same with Christian thinkers who see politics as part of salvation history. There’s truth in this, but there is also a valid reason why. It would make our analysis circumspect if we pay attention to the situation-in-time of Machiavelli and his Italy.³³ If we do this, it cannot easily be said that there is no moral element in Machiavelli’s thoughts.³⁴ It is not the case that Machiavelli is ordinarily and

³² The point is, one may not necessarily agree to Machiavelli’s moral or ethical perspective but this does not mean that he does not have one. It may be correct to say that in essence the Renaissance thinker’s views are not in harmony with that of Christianity but it must also be kept in mind that in the wider landscape of Ethics, Christian ethics is not the only ethical school of thought. See for example Vittorio Hosle, “Ethics and Economics, or How Much of Egoism does Modern Capitalism Need? Machiavelli’s, Mandeville’s, and Malthus’s New Insight and its Challenge”, Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, *Acta: Crisis in a Global Economy, Re-planning the Journey*, no. 16 [2011]: 494. Including Machiavelli in his reference of the ethical foundation of capitalism, V. Hosle argues: “But it would be wrong to overlook their moral seriousness: they do not invite humans to engage in behavior that most people still regarded as repulsive simply because this will increase their individual profit; no, their argument transcends personal interests and is oriented towards the common good. This makes their stance an ethical one, despite the sarcasm they occasionally show, and distinguishes them from ancient immoralists, such as Thrasymachus in Plato’s *Politeia* or Calicles in his *Gorgias*, whose position cannot, and does not seek to, be universalized. Let us look at the basic moral idea in the three most popular works of our authors.” It must be noted that Hosle does not liken Machiavelli to Thrasymachus; this is a position contrary to Abulad’s.

³³ G.W.F. Hegel’s words are noteworthy: “One must approach the reading of *The Prince* with the history of the centuries elapsed before Machiavelli as well as the history of his contemporary Italy directly in mind, and the world will not only be vindicated, but appear to be a supremely great and true conception of a real political mind, operation in the greatest and noblest sense.” See G.W.F. Hegel, “Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Italy”, J.G. Nichols, trans. *The Prince* (United Kingdom: Alma, 2009), 106.

³⁴ Sebastian De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage/Random, 1994), 71. De Grazia’s commentary gives us a reading of Machiavelli that is somewhat different: “Few would how that Niccolo is a moral absolutist. Yet he never questions that there is good

without any qualification supportive of any naked reduction of politics to power.

Because this section is not intended for a longer exposition of Machiavellian political thought, it would help for the purpose of further survey to mention some works that would provide a nuanced and properly contextualized reading of Machiavelli. Sebastian de Grazia's *Machiavelli in Hell* offers an intellectual biography of the Italian thinker. The work is described by the *Journal of Modern History* as vivid and credible.³⁵ Giovanni Giorgini's "Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited" in the book by David Johnston and others, *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, argues that Machiavelli "did not discount the role of morality in politics but believed that politics [has] a distinct and discrete dimension of duty."³⁶ Another work by the same author discusses Machiavelli's political philosophy as a vision of statesmanship and, thus, an educational project for rulers. In his short article "Cicero and Machiavelli: Two Visions of Statesmanship and Two Educational Projects Compared," Giorgini describes the Renaissance thinker's notion of statesmanship as one that is informed by Humanism and thus regards virtue in leadership as important.³⁷ For all the

and evil. Authentic norms exist." See V. Hosle, "Ethics and Economics", 494. To rephrase Hosle, Machiavelli does not invite humans "to engage in behavior that most people still regarded as repulsive simply because this will increase their individual profit; no, their argument transcends personal interests and is oriented towards the common good."

³⁵ De Grazia's chapters 1 and 2 are instructive.

³⁶ Giovanni Giorgini, "Machiavelli on Good and Evil: The Problem of Dirty Hands Revisited", David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati and Camila Vergara, eds. *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 58.

³⁷ Giovanni Giorgini, "Cicero and Machiavelli: Two Visions of Statesmanship and Two Educational Projects Compared", *Etica and Politica*, XVI, 2 (2014): 506-515. See N.F. Cantor and P. Klein's compilation of Machiavelli's works in N.F. Cantor and P. Klein, *Renaissance Thought: Dante and Machiavelli* (Massachusetts: Blaisdell, 1969). An excerpt from A. Gilbert's *Machiavelli: The Chief Works* is included in Cantor and Klein's, thus Machiavelli's view on the "greatest good as that which one does to one's country." In Machiavelli's words: "I believe that the greatest honor men can have is that which is willingly given them by their native lands. I believe that the greatest good that can be done, and the most pleasing to God, is that which is done to one's country" (p. 123-124). And if duty to one's country is the greatest good which each citizen or subject can do, then how much more the ruler, whose chief task to ensure the safety and security of his state. Precisely why in Book I of the Discourses Machiavelli says: "Happy is that state which produces a man prudent enough to provide it with laws and institutions by which it may

distinction of Machiavelli's political theory from that of Aristotle, it is argued that the roots of Machiavellian thought, especially on political statecraft, are found in Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.³⁸

We can go on with a long list of more recent studies and researches that would support and relate to the abovementioned literature. An important point to highlight, though, is the fact that Machiavelli cannot be faulted for conceptualizing politics the way he did it. In fact, he should be credited for providing a perspective that fills in a lacuna that was not given attention by political theorists and philosophers before him. One has to also keep in mind that unlike the other philosophers, Machiavelli does not have a metaphysics of his own. He is not into systematic philosophy. One may even argue that he is not a philosopher in the strict sense of the term. But even without dilating this issue, there are certain points that any analyst of Machiavelli's political thought should not miss out or else render a partial or half-reading of his political thought.

First point: politics is a reality and it is, no matter what, part of human existence. It is safe to say that all political theorists agree that power and subordination are basic themes in politics. Politics is not politics without power and political obligation, and vice-versa. That Thomas Aquinas speaks of an ideal kingship in his *De Regno* is an evidence of this.³⁹ In fact, the use of political power which is concrete in the subjection of a human being to another human being (subordination) was problematized by Augustine in the context of a fallen human race.⁴⁰ Authority which is the legitimate exercise of power has been the object of theorizing among political

live securely without any need to alter them." See N. Machiavelli, "The Discourses Upon the First Ten Books of Titus Livy" in Daniel Donno, trans. and ed., *The Prince* (New York: Bantam, 1981), 91.

³⁸ Giorgini, "Cicero and Machiavelli", 507.

³⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, "On Kingship", D. Bigongiari, ed., *The Political Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 175. In the words of Thomas: "It is natural for man, more than for any other animal, to be a social and political animal, to live in a group. This is clearly the necessity of man's nature" Chapter 1 [4 and 5].

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 693-694. Thus: "He did not intend that His rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but the irrational creation – not man over man, but man over the beasts" (see Book XIX, 15, on Liberty Proper to Man's Nature).

philosophers through the centuries. Ranging from the question about the best form of government to what constitutes a valid and legitimate exercise of power, the reality to which we are thrown, that is the facticity where we are in (to borrow a Heideggerian term) is undeniably one that is located at the intersections of authority, and thus power and power-relations.

The very reality of power and its effects on our daily life cannot but necessitate any thinker or philosopher to analyze and reflect on the very nature of power itself. This is basically the case with Machiavelli who was trying to make sense of his time's political situation. One cannot but fairly say that insofar as what he proposes on statesmanship within the context of Renaissance Italy, Machiavelli was not only being strategic but also advanced and in fact a pioneer in the conception of modern public administration. In reading *The Prince*, for example, attention must be given to details; otherwise some of its points would be magnified out of context, thus the notion of Machiavelli's amorality or anti-morality. If chapters I – XXV of the said treatise is read in light of chapter XXVI, a more sound interpretation should lead to the conclusion that ultimately the vision of politics, as suggested, is the establishment of a land that is free from war, division, and injustice. The strategies, therefore, advised to the ruler are necessary in a context where he is confronted with turmoil, challenges, and the absence of order.⁴¹

How about the rather common view on Machiavelli's subordination of ethics or morality to politics? This question brings us to the second point where politics intersects with morality or the wider plane of religion. It

⁴¹ Chapter II in fact is clear: the discussion shall include Republics and shall consider only principalities which are either hereditary or acquired. See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter II, in Donno, 13. For a commentary on XXVI of *The Prince*, see Miguel Vatter, "Machiavelli and the Republican Conception of Providence", *The Review of Politics* 25 (2013): 605-623. Vatter disagrees with the position that Machiavelli's conception of God is similar to that of Republican Christianity. For him, the political philosopher was influenced by messianic politics as reflected in XXVI of *The Prince* in terms of the Arabic and Jewish politico-philosophical reflections on prophets (see p. 607). Thus, for our commentator: "In chapter 26 [of *The Prince*] Machiavelli no longer speaks about politics from the plane of the natural history of mankind, but rather from the plane of its sacred history, more particularly, from what appears to be a politico-theological understanding of sacred history..." (pp. 608-609).

would help if this early we make a remark that across centuries, the discussion on the duality between the Divine and the Secular, religion and politics, Church and state, has been essentially sustained. The goal cannot be the collapse or the disappearance of such a duality. Any attempt to do this would end up fashioning politics into something totalitarian. The point is how to keep and acknowledge the sphere of the political autonomous from the spiritual or religious.⁴²

The goal of religion, the monotheistic faiths to be exact, is the salvation of souls. But even in Augustine, there is an acknowledgment that temporal justice and thus politics is a necessary precondition to Divine justice. What people speak of Machiavelli's amorality, especially when linked to his treatment of the religious landscape of Italy during his days, is therefore missing the point. Basically, his philosophy offers a kind of realism which sees things this way: while the goal of morality, especially religious morality, is the salvation of souls, this cannot be the politician's goal.⁴³ In this sense, Machiavelli may not be a proponent of Christian morality; however, one should be circumspect by not concluding that he did not see the place of morality in politics and that he was fully antagonistic to morality.⁴⁴

⁴² Machiavelli acknowledges the value of religion and the contribution it brings to the preservation of the political system. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, XII. "Princes and republics concerned with keeping the state from corruption must above all see to it that their religious ceremonies remain uncorrupted and continue to be properly venerated, for every religion has its vital source in some one of its principal institutions." Further, he adds: "The rulers or republics or kingdoms must therefore seek to preserve the principles of their own religion. Having done this, they will find it an easy matter to keep the state devout, obedient and united."

⁴³ See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXVI.

⁴⁴ In *The Discourses*, Machiavelli acknowledges the role of religion although, apparently, he is critical of the Roman Church of his time. It would be more prudent on the part of the reader or interpreter to make a broad distinction between morality and/or ethics as an integral component of human civilization and Christian morality/ethics which is a specific outlook or manner of living. Machiavelli may be critical of the latter but not necessarily of the former. Behind his conception of a successful republic is the conviction that religion is of great contribution to collective discipline. See N. Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, XI (On the Religion of the Romans) and XII (The Importance with which Religion must be Regarded and how Italy, Lacking it, Thanks to the Church of Rome, has been Ruined). See G. Giorgini: "It may sound paradoxical, but Machiavelli's 'murderous doctrine' is not so distant from the Platonic view that the philosopher must sacrifice his

This leads us to the third but still a related point: political obligation and human nature. Abulad considers Machiavelli as a pessimistic theorist of human nature, and for this, he puts the Italian thinker side by side with Hobbes. To date, the question concerning human nature is one of the enduring themes in philosophy that has even crossed-over to psychology, anthropology, and biology. It is possible that Machiavelli may not be right in his assumption that man by nature is evil. It must be highlighted, though, that he is not alone in this assumption.⁴⁵ Augustine, in fact, had a similar starting point in his *The City of God*.⁴⁶ But, again, assuming that Machiavelli is, to some extent, pessimistic in his essentialization of the human person as evil, what must not be missed out is the fact that the discussion on human nature is only secondary to the primary concern which is a political obligation. The three widely known social contract theorists --Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau-- were primarily concerned with the justification for humanity's submission to political authority. But because such a justification requires an abstract – ahistorical – explanation, if you may, thus the assumptions on the nature of the human person either as evil or good.

Apparently, there is always a consideration or a room reserved for that very possibility of human beings violating the laws either of God or society. This further means that even among political philosophers who believe in the basic capacity or disposition of the human person to do good there is an acknowledgment of the reality of evil, and for this reason, political obligation and control are necessary; hence the systematization of subordination is justified. This leads us to a related point, and that is the legitimate use of violence. Machiavelli is apparently not alone in the belief that violence

personal happiness in favour of that of the entire community, and a very significant offspring of the statesman's action to save is the state is the salvation of souls of his fellow citizens, which is impossible in a context of war and anarchy" G. Giorgini, "Machiavelli on Good and Evil", 62.

⁴⁵ Citing Machiavelli's *Exhortation to Penitence*, S. De Grazia explains that though man was created by God but his nature is fallen. Thus they are "readier for evil than good." S. De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, 75.

⁴⁶ The Church Father taught, in light of the Christian Tradition, that though originally created good, the human person has a fallen nature and this makes him subject to dominion.

cannot but be part of politics. Question 40 of II.II of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* asks whether "[i]t is always sinful to wage war?"⁴⁷ The construction of the question, at least in the English translation, itself seems to already suggest an answer. By putting the term *always* it seems to be suggested that there can be an exception to the general norm. Thomas cites Augustine, who in *Contra Faustum* XXII makes a distinction between taking the sword as a private person and using it (doing violence or waging war) because there is an order by a legitimate authority for the pursuit of justice.⁴⁸

We go back to Abulad whose appraisal of Machiavelli apparently reduced him to an archetype of politics with little or no regard for morality or virtue. Machiavelli may not have developed a systematic treatment of politics and political concerns within the ethical framework. Two important things can be our response to this: (1) even among political philosophers who have a clear and extensive ethical treatment of politics have acknowledged the reality of evil in the sphere of politics (the secular sphere if we may) and thus some exceptions or justifications for lesser evils to be considered if only to defend the greater good, and (2) the exercise of power by way of legitimate authority is acknowledged, and in this light, a certain kind of standard should be considered for temporal rulers distinct from that of the religious. In the words of one Italian commentator:

In our philosopher's world men do not have an inherent impulse toward the common good. Quite the reverse. These wicked and unruly men are not just a few: they comprise

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. II.II., q. 40.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Book XXII, no. 75. Available from: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/140622.htm>. 1 October 2020. In the words of Augustine: "A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have for doing so; for the natural order which seeks the peace of mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable, and that the soldiers should perform their military duties in behalf of the peace and safety of the community. When war is undertaken in obedience to God, who would rebuke, or humble, or crush the pride of man, it must be allowed to be a righteous war; for even the wars which arise from human passion cannot harm the eternal well-being of God, nor even hurt His saints; for in the trial of their patience, and the chastening of their spirit, and in bearing fatherly correction, they are rather benefited than injured."

mankind. Their nature originates in some kind of a fall, and they are henceforth set in motion by appetites or passions, abetted by mind or reason, and directed towards various evils in all extensions and forms . . . The greatest mistake is to think that men will arrive at the common good guided by such [rational] nature. It leads only to ruin. They must arrive by some other way.⁴⁹

In light of the foregoing, politics is an act and not merely an ideational construction. In the end it is a choice. It is a manner of proceeding that involves whatever combination of management necessary to succeed. It is not true that politics does not involve moral evaluation. It certainly does, but not in the same categories as religion. It must be clear to the politician that without necessarily being anti-religious, the moral conventions of religion cannot be the same at all times with that of politics. This is what de Grazia refers to when he speaks of Machiavelli's reformation of hell. Unlike Dante, who consigns to hell only some sinners, Machiavelli believes that hell is needed for everyone. Hell is needed in politics, much as it is needed in religion. Hell is the destiny of all politicians. In the words of De Grazia: "Niccolo wants prospective heroes not to love their soul more than their country, not to think of the evil they must enter as true evil, not to be hesitant of fear of hell."⁵⁰ Rulers have to be trained in virtue more than just being reliant on fortune. Politics requires an understanding of what and who are being managed, and of the very vision of the very process of governance or management.

⁴⁹ S. De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, 269. No less the great philosopher of history, G.W.F. Hegel explains the wider philosophical context that would serve as a justification for Machiavelli's proposal in *The Prince*. Hegel sees anarchy as a much graver crime against the state and in fact the only crime against the state. In his own words: "The pursuit of anarchy is the gravest, in fact the only crime against the state; because all crimes that a state has to suffer go in this direction, and those who are not, like most criminals, attacking the state indirectly, but directly, are the worst criminals, and the state has no higher duty than to preserve itself and to destroy the power of these criminals in the safest way possible." G.W.F. Hegel, "Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Italy", 107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 338.

Is there an Alternative to Politics?

- *Politics is politics and there is, as it appears, so far, no alternative to it.*

The argument that one can go beyond politics by going beyond Machiavelli is generally impossible, if not unrealistic. The idea that management is an alternative to politics is not theoretically or practically viable either. There used to be a specific distinction for politics as an activity of the *polis*, that is, the State, and thus a public activity, a thing of the public – a *res publica*. Does this mean that management does not apply to politics and thus not a political issue? Apparently, no. From the viewpoint of political dynamics, there is so much politics when managing people even in private organizations or institutions. And it has been since decades ago that social activists have asserted that “the personal is political.”⁵¹ Politics cannot be limitedly associated with the State to the exclusion of the private (sphere). It can be said, therefore, that management is a variant of politics. It may sound like the more formal, if the not purified version of politics, but essentially it operates within the same logic of politics. Management, therefore, is a political strategy. In fact, it is interesting to note that there was a shift, decades ago, from the term Public Administration to Public Management and that theorists and practitioners of the said field have been talking about a New Public Management. There is no need, at this point, to provide a litany of evidences as to how, through the years, Machiavelli has been used as a framework for management paradigms. It can be argued, therefore, that Sun Tzu is the oriental version of Machiavelli or vice-versa. And that essentially both suggest the same things: create deception and still get the desired goal or accomplish the mission, which is to acquire, retain and expand power. No less than Abulad himself understands the matter similarly:

⁵¹ The slogan “the personal is political” is associated with the feminist movement of the 1960s because of Carol Hanisch’s essay titled “The Personal is Political.” Although years later, Hanisch would not claim original authorship of the title, but her essay speaks of the same message as represented specifically by her assertion that “personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions . . . There is only collective action for a collective solution.” See Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” *Women’s Liberation*, 2009, <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html> (accessed October 25, 2020).

“Even where Sun Tzu speaks of ‘deception’ (my emphasis), he means ‘trickery’ (emphasis) not greed or wolfishness.”⁵²

Do Philosophy and Politics Mix? Is a Post-Political Situation Possible?

Politics pervades human relations. There is a truth in the statement that everything is political if this is meant to describe the situation that persons and things are within the sphere of political control or influence in one way or another.

Initially, the answer to the question do philosophy and politics mix is in the affirmative. There is a point of intersection between philosophy and politics, ethics and law. In fact, even in Aristotle, politics and philosophy do not just mix – politics is an extension of ethics; it brings ethics to its fullness. Politics is called the master art or science because it harmonizes and regulates all other arts or sciences.⁵³

However, it would be best to raise this discourse to a higher level and ask further: granting that realistically philosophy and politics engage and encounter in the world of facticity, is there a possibility of an event where one can go beyond the political? Abulad speaks of this as going beyond Machiavelli, which, as has been demonstrated in the foregoing, is not doable. At the risk of oversimplification, one cannot go beyond politics by just going beyond Machiavelli.

⁵² Abulad, “Philosophy and Politics”, 14. See Vittorio Hosle, “The Relationship between Politics and Morals: Concepts of the Political and Concepts of the Moral”, *Morals and Politics* (Indiana: Notre Dame, 2005), 63-64.

⁵³ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, 2”, W.D. Ross, trans. *The Pocket Aristotle* (New York: Washington Square, 1958), 160. In Thomas Aquinas, law is an ordinance of reason, and this reason is the rule and measure of human acts (which is the very subject of Ethics). Thus, politics and ethics fields that properly form part of one and the same source which is reason, with one and the same end and that is the common good. See, Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I.II, q. 90 (Of the Essence of the Law)

So, again, can there be a post-political choice or situation, is this possibility even possible, of going beyond politics not just by going beyond Machiavelli but much further and farther—the foundation of his thinking, that is the idea that there is a necessity for subjection (even if by this we think of positive leadership, strategy or management) and thus of political obligation.

A much deeper exploration of the question “do philosophy and politics mix” actually invites a reconsideration of the initial affirmation as stated above. In itself, the question seems to suggest a rather unconventional position. Here, I must say that Abulad could have been more radical enough in his interpretation by not limiting himself to Machiavelli but by critiquing politics even that which claims to be most ethically founded. This way, he could have gone farther to the edges of reason in search for an answer to his own question.

I would dare take the position that the question Abulad asks actually hints that possibility, somewhere in the facticity of existence, of a post-political situation. That philosophy and politics mix is a general position that is almost always irrefutable; however, there can be that event where philosophy may have to resist politics and thus go beyond it and all its totalizing claims. That no matter how obvious the impact and extent of politics may be on all of human life, there actually remains a radical human option, more humanizing in fact, to decide at a certain point to suspend politics.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ I do not want to digress from the discussion, and limitation in space also prevents me from elaborating further. However I am thinking along the line of Alain Badiou who speaks of philosophy as a clarification of choice, a clarification of the distance between power and truth, and a thinking of the exception. If as Badiou says “the sole task of philosophy is to show that we must choose” (p. 5) then it is arguable in light of this perspective that an ultimate philosophical moment is a choice to go beyond politics. His second example in the essay explains why the necessity of a certain post-political instance or event: “In the end, power is violence” and unlike this (power) creative thought (philosophy) only recognizes its immanent rules, thus, and at the edges of human existence “there is no common measure” between the “right of the State” and “creative thought” and that “between power and truth there is a distance” (pp. 7-8). See Alain Badiou, “Thinking the Event”, Peter Engelmann, ed., *Philosophy in the Present: Badiou and Zizek* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 1-15.

Ethics ought to guide politics. This does not only mean politics in the Machiavellian notion but of the term in its broadest sense. However, even that kind of politics that thinks of, proceeds from, and move towards virtue, is in its very nature, a step towards the creation of totalizing discourses, ideations, categorizations and hence structures of governance, which are interwoven with control, regulation, domination, and unavoidably violence. This is what Carl Schmitt refers to as the power of the *Political* over the “physical life of men,” thus making the political community “transcend all other associations of society.”⁵⁵ There is serious merit then in asking do philosophy and politics mix, but this can only be seriously answered by radicalizing the question: doesn't one have an option to suspend politics, even that kind of politics that presumes to proceed from the best of intentions? Even the most virtue-based or ethics-based construct of politics, as has been discussed in the foregoing, necessitates that radical admission that there is always the reality of evil and thus war in any kind of political community and context.

This reality is precisely what has to be interrogated, which is being subjected to the question: can this be overcome? Can one, at some point or at a particular instance, choose to move beyond the edges of the political? This is a question anyone interested in politics will have to answer. And this is a question anyone who claims to be a philosopher, especially a political philosopher, should ask; the failure to do so is grievous, and more so if such failure is nothing but mere deference to the repeated claims of those thinkers who have been enlisted in the canon of political thought but whose interpretations are in no way dogmatic.

In conclusion, I would say, for the purpose of clarity, that by interrogating the totality of politics, my position pushes for a serious consideration of the need for a thinking and rethinking of a post-political choice or situation (or even event or moment), and a daring yet qualified negative response to Abulad's question: do philosophy and politics mix?

⁵⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 47.

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