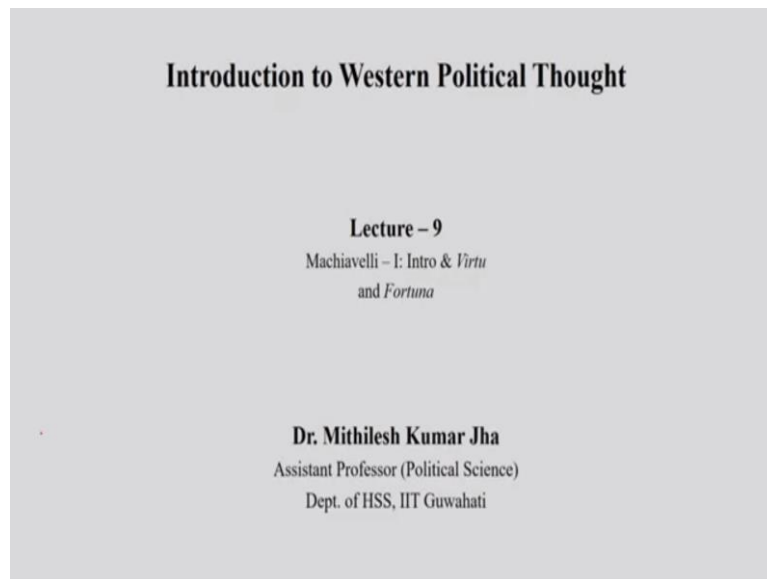


**Introduction to Western Political Thought**  
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**Lecture No. 9**  
**Machiavelli- I: Intro & Virtu and Fortuna**

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Hello and welcome everyone. Today, we are going to start with the next thinker in our course, Machiavelli. And on Machiavelli, again, we are going to have three lectures. In the first lecture on Machiavelli, we will list out to situate him in the larger political, and intellectual context of western political thought. And how he was trying to redefine the contours of politics and political theorisation by differentiating the norms or values that is associated with politics in the Christian religious theorisation. What is the rule of politics? what is the temporal authority? In the second part of the first lecture, we are going to discuss Machiavelli's views on Virtu and Fortuna. In the second lecture of Machiavelli, we will particularly focus on his magnum opus or most widely read, discussed and debated text with competing interpretation, *The Prince*.

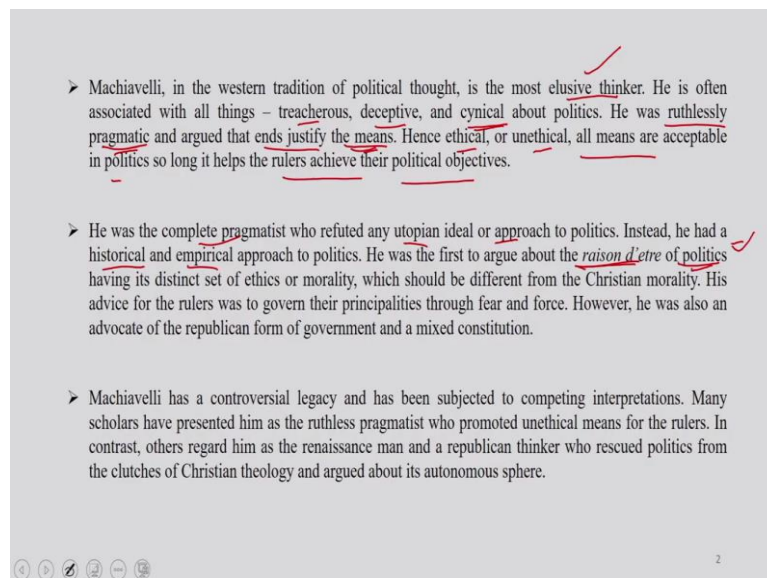
And in the final lecture, we are going to focus on his another important text, *Discourses* and then we will move onto critically access the contribution of Machiavelli to western political thought.

In this lecture today, we are particularly going to discuss Machiavelli's role in redefining politics and asserting its distinct or autonomous sphere from the religion or other concerns of our individual and collective life. And for a very long time, politics was subordinated to religion within the Christianity. Machiavelli was the first one who began to assert the autonomy or independence of politics with its own distinct affair.

With its own set of morality and ethics yet he was someone who was not really a modern thinker like Hobbes Locke, Rousseau and others. Machiavelli had a kind of peculiar situation within the western political thought, where he was not like the Christian thinkers like Saint Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. But he was someone trying to reset the autonomy of the polity by revisiting the classical text or humanitarian interpretation of the rule of politics.

And how human being themselves through their reason and tact can create a polity which would allow them to lead a worthy life and they do not have to subordinate to the feet or to the religion, to lead a good, moral or worthy life as Christian philosopher or thinkers have suggested. We will also discuss his views on Virtù and Fortuna which are at the centre or the basis of his political thinking and theorization.

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- Machiavelli, in the western tradition of political thought, is the most elusive thinker. He is often associated with all things – treacherous, deceptive, and cynical about politics. He was ruthlessly pragmatic and argued that ends justify the means. Hence ethical, or unethical, all means are acceptable in politics so long it helps the rulers achieve their political objectives.
- He was the complete pragmatist who refuted any utopian ideal or approach to politics. Instead, he had a historical and empirical approach to politics. He was the first to argue about the *raison d'être* of politics having its distinct set of ethics or morality, which should be different from the Christian morality. His advice for the rulers was to govern their principalities through fear and force. However, he was also an advocate of the republican form of government and a mixed constitution.
- Machiavelli has a controversial legacy and has been subjected to competing interpretations. Many scholars have presented him as the ruthless pragmatist who promoted unethical means for the rulers. In contrast, others regard him as the renaissance man and a republican thinker who rescued politics from the clutches of Christian theology and argued about its autonomous sphere.

That would be the themes, we are going to discuss today. Let us start with studying Machiavelli as someone in the western political thought who was most elusive thinker. What does it mean that Machiavelli is an elusive thinker? Machiavelli has a kind of unique position in western political thought who is not really a philosopher like Aristotle and Plato which we

have done. He is more kind of pragmatist or someone involved in the actual politics of his time.

And wanted to unify or wanted to create a polity which would be stable, effective and how to do it. He was not guided by a priory notion of good or bad, justice, desirable or undesirable. And that allowed multiple interpretation of Machiavelli. So, often you come across the actual practical politics in any society even today to which we associate power for the sake of power.

And everything goes in the politics, it is treacherousness and tactfulness. All kind of manipulations or negative connotation that we associate with politics is often associated with the thinking or theorization of Machiavelli. That is the dominant understanding of Machiavelli in politics. However, we will see that Machiavelli's argument or theorization is much more complex than this caricatured view of Machiavelli.

There are competing interpretations of Machiavelli's thoughts and theorization on politics. However, he remained somewhat elusive. Because the way he approached politics, and the kind of advice that he gave to the King. And the way he tried to rescue the politics from other domains of life was something very unique and specific to the Machiavellian theorization or modes of thinking about politics. That makes him somewhat unique or elusive thinker in western political thought.

Thus, any negative connotation that you can think of politics in any society or community such as treacherousness or deceptiveness or its cynical view about politics is associated with Aristotle. And he was seen as someone, a ruthlessly pragmatic thinker and argued that ends justify the means. One of the Machiavellian axioms is that in politics, means in itself cannot be said moral or immoral, ethical or unethical. But the end, it achieves will justify the means.

Many people would argue that Machiavelli was suggesting in politics to achieve your purpose, to obtain your goal. All kind of means whether ethical, or unethical, he will or you know virtues are perfectly okay. So long it helps you to achieve your desire, goal or political objectives. He is seen as a kind of ruthlessly pragmatic thinker who justified the means. All kind of means to achieve a desired political objective. Thus, means justify the means.

So, means, that a thinker or a Prince will deploy is immaterial so long the ends that such means are deployed for is desirable or help the community to achieve certain goals or help the ruler to sustain or establish their rule or authority in the community. He is someone who

regarded that the means in itself is not something moral or ethical. But the ends that justify the means. Hence, the ethical, unethical, and all means are acceptable in politics.

So long it helps the rulers achieve their political ability and that is something which you see often in the political behaviour of different parties, and leaders driven by not ordinary conventional morality or desirable or undesirable modes effect. But anything that helps them achieve their desired objective.

Now, that is a kind of crude understanding of Machiavellian politics which we are going to discuss over the course of three lectures that how his justification for such moral and immoral, evil actions are rooted in the larger dynamics of his thought which is to a great extent based on this Christian understanding of human being as someone who is inherently evil.

And this understanding of human nature as immoral, unethical, we have fallen from the grace is there in Hobbes thinking also and Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as I have said who established the supremacy of God and Christianity or religion and subordinated the rule of politics have the similar notion of human nature.

Machiavellian understanding allowed us to understand that politics is not just merely ethical, moral or virtues action as we have seen in Plato and Aristotle. But it is also something that has to deal with evil and how a ruler or governor is going to deal with that evil is something that he discussed in the *Prince* and also in *Discourse*.

In political theorization and thinking, the evils or immoral actions are also something which a ruler or governor needs to deal with. How one is going to address those things is something which requires our knowledge, our Virtù, or to avoid the negative repercussions or influence of Fortuna which we are going to discuss in the second part of the lecture.

So, it is something which needs to be said that we have to be cautious when we have a kind of crude understanding of Machiavellian politics in the sense of everything that is immoral, treacherous, manipulative, deceptive about the politics.

He is saying something more than that and using it as a means to establish the rule and the order in the society. So, what is distinctive about Machiavelli is that he was complete pragmatist and refuted any kind of Utopian or ideal approach to politics. Unlike Plato and

Aristotle who thought about politics as a collective exercise to achieve some common good or certain sense of justice through human reason or intellect.

That is the classical premise of politics. Machiavelli as a pragmatist or empirical thinker refuted all kind of such utopian prior innocence of justice and good for the polity. He was ruthlessly pragmatist, an empirical thinker who wanted to change the politics as it is through the experience, knowledge of history by developing the Virtù and understanding that human nature is not necessary moral or virtues. There are evils which persist in the society.

So, how in that given objective state of human affairs, one was going to create a polity which would ensure order and stability or efficiency. That was his concern and in pursuit of such concern, he refuted any kind of utopian or ideal approach to the politics. Instead, he had historical advice to the Prince. The knowledge of history is absolutely crucial for Machiavelli even when he argued about a republican form of government or mixed constitution.

In this course, the knowledge of history is something which enables the ruler to understand the moment and necessity of that moment. And in politics, the moment is something which determines the fate of a ruler or polity. So, when the governor or ruler are through their knowledge of history capable of understanding the moment and the necessity of that moment, the kind of action that is required allows the ruler, to sustain the rule, to achieve glory for himself and for the principality.

The empirical or historical approach is the determinant thing in Machiavellian approach to politics not the utopian or ideal thinking as it is there in Plato and Aristotle. He was the first to argue about the *raison d'être* that meant the existence of politics was not for something else. It had its own legitimacy or justification for its existence. Thus, this *raison d'être* of politics was guided by different set of ethics which should be different from the Christian morality or ethics.

His advice for the rulers was to govern their principalities through fear and force. However, he was also an advocate of republican form of government and a mixed constitution which we will see in the third lecture. So, Machiavelli has therefore a kind of controversial legacy and is subjected to competing interpretation. Many scholars have presented him as the ruthless pragmatist who promoted unethical means for the rulers.

Thus, all the ethical, unethical, moral, immoral, evil, treacherous, and all sorts of means are legitimate, justifiable so long it helps the ruler to sustain his rule or achieve certain desired

political objectives. For a number of scholars, Machiavelli is seen as someone a kind of ruthless pragmatist who supported all sorts of evil practices in politics. In contrast to this interpretation of Machiavelli, there are many others who regarded him as the renaissance man or a humanist who was a republican thinker and rescued politics from the clutches of Christian theology and asserted its own autonomous and distinct sphere with distinct set of ethics or morality.

And that distinguished Machiavelli from other medieval thinker of Christian theology or their imagination of politics or temporal authority that they associated with the monarchy which was always subordinated to the transcendental or superior rule of the Pope or church.

Machiavelli had a very peculiar situation among the political thinkers which turned tradition. He was not exactly a modern thinker and yet rooted in the Renaissance with revisiting the classical or bringing back the humanist tradition of the classical tradition, where the human reason or intellect itself is capable of managing the collective affairs. And not the subordination to the religion or God as it is there in the Christian theology and ethics.

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**Political and Intellectual Context**

- Machiavelli was writing in a time when Italy, the seat of the Roman empire, was in turbulence. The Roman empire was fragmented into many principalities, often at war with each other. There were political uncertainties and upheavals. Moral and political degeneration, violence, and instabilities characterized the governing of principalities.
- Christian ethics and conventional morality rooted in the philosophy of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas could not provide stability and necessary order in these principalities. Saint Augustine (354-430) in the *City of God* argued about the idea of original sin and evil or fallen nature of human beings – hence he argued that reason or intellect alone could not lead men to moral, ethical life. Therefore they must subject themselves to the will of God. In this assessment, politics is temporary and imperfect and therefore, could not be the source of stability or even ethics (redemption) as in Classical Greek times. He, therefore, subordinated politics to theology. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1273) regarded the supremacy of theology but argued about the checks of the temporal power of kings or monarchies through a mixed constitution and the mechanism of checks and balances. He combined the Christian concepts with Aristotelian ideas.
- Machiavelli set out to refute any Christian or conventional morality or utopian approach to politics. Unlike Christian theology, which presented the past as linear, Machiavelli as a renaissance thinker, argued about a cyclical view of history. Thus all states are subject to change. He desired republican rule if possible, but if that is not possible, he favored the rule by the Prince, who could unify Italy and bring back the past glory of the Roman empire. Thus, Machiavelli's political thought should also be assessed in this context where he wanted the unification of Italy and restoration of the republican glory of classical Rome.

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There are competing interpretations of Machiavelli. Now, if you look at Machiavelli's political and intellectual context, one thing that we need to take into account is he is from Florence, Italy and there was a kind of degeneration of Holy Roman Empire. Machiavelli was writing or theorizing about politics in a time when Italy was the seat of Roman Empire and in turbulence. The Roman Empire was fragmented into many principalities which was often at war with each other.

And there are political uncertainties and upheavals. The moral and political degeneration, violence and instabilities characterises the governing of these principalities or city-states which had a republican form of government. Italian peninsula was divided and fragmented into different principalities with their own set of rules and mechanism of governing their collective life. But the politics that characterised these principalities was that of political uncertainties, violence, moral degeneration, and the constant interferences by the external forces such as the ruler of France or Spain.

Machiavelli was thinking about revival of politics or role of politics in this turbulent time of Italy. And Christian ethics and the conventional morality which was rooted in the philosophy of two particular thinkers, Saint Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas which provided a kind of stability to the idea of divine right of the King or the superiority of religion to the politics or monarchy.

So, the Christian ethics and conventional morality which were rooted in the philosophy of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas could not provide the stability and necessary order in these principalities, when Machiavelli was thinking about the role of politics. If you briefly look at Saint Augustine's idea which was carried particularly by Hobbes, Machiavelli and many other political thinkers in western tradition particularly about his views on human nature.

Saint Augustine in the 'City of Gods' argued about the idea of original sin and that becomes the basis of thinking about human nature or human characteristic particularly when we think about the Hobbes human nature as nasty, brutish and short. This is immoral, unethical or violent nature in the human being. Now, how it is possible to establish order or legitimacy for the rule given that kind of human nature that is there.

So, Saint Augustine, in the 'City of Gods' argued about the idea of original sin and evil or fallen nature of human being. Hence, he argued, contrary to the classical thinkers like Plato and Aristotle that reason or intellect alone could not lead man to moral, or an ethical life.

Because of this original sin or evil nature of human character, his reason or intellect alone was not capable of ensuring the moral and ethical life for the individual. This is contrast to Plato and Aristotle's imagination if you recall our lectures on them. Though intellect, and reason should guide not just the human being but also the city-states or the polity. Here, Saint

Augustine was arguing that men were inevitably evil or evil nature, treacherous, and fallen from the grace because of the original sin.

So, the reason and intellect in itself is not sufficient to lead a moral and ethical life. And therefore, they must subject themselves to the will of God and then there is the idea of the chosen one. The redemption of life is possible when you submit to the God and God's will and it is up to the God who are chosen to lead a moral and ethical life which is beyond the limits of human intellect and reason. In this assessment, politics is temporary and imperfect and therefore, it could not be the source of stability or ethics or redemption as in the Classical Greek times.

In Saint Augustine approach to the politics, it was subordinated to the role of religion. He subordinated, therefore, the politics to theology which became the basis of the divine right of the Kings or stability in the Christendom between religious authority and political authority.

Religion is seen as the transcendental or superior authority than to the monarchy or temporal authority of different monarchs and Kings. There was a kind of relationship between the religious authority and political authority which became problematic when Machiavelli was thinking or theorising about the politics.

And this is the tussle between the religious authority and political authority that leads to the imagination of politics in the modern sense or the secular politics where politics has its own sphere which is independent from the religious sphere. And in the modern times when we will discuss many modern thinkers, we will see that how religion becomes part of personal life and has very little to determine what is the public or the political life of the city or the state or the democracies which we will discuss later.

However, Saint Augustine provided that philosophical basis for superiority of the religious authority to the temporal authority exercised by monarchy through their politics and other activities.

Similarly, Thomas Aquinas regarded the supremacy of theology. But he argued about the checks of the temporal power of monarchy through a mixed constitution and the mechanism of checks and balances. He combined the Aristotelian ideas of checks and balances in the mixed constitution. How to exercise a power in a much more reasonable way without the access to its fight or to involve in the immoral act that is associated with the political temporal.



These two thinkers did provide a kind of stable basis for the religion or theology to subordinate the politics. However, when Machiavelli was thinking or writing about the politics, this thinking or theorization could not provide the desirable stability and order in the principalities or qualities.

Now, Machiavelli set out to refute this Christian and conventional morality or utopian approach to politics. Unlike Christian theology which presented the past as a kind of linear. There is a kind of movement in the human affair where the movement is a kind of linear one. So, from the immoral or sinful life to the ethical or perfect moral, religious, spiritual life is possible when the God chose the one who can achieve those lives.

And the moment in the history is from the sinful to ethical to the most holy ways of living, acting or governing the city-states. There is a kind of linearity which dominate the thinking about the time and history in western tradition.

In contrast to the classical thinker, Machiavelli had a kind of circular or cyclical view of history and this you can recall with the characterisation of six kinds of qualities in Aristotle. So, we start with the monarchy then there is a moment of a tyrannical regime, then aristocracy which turned into oligarchy and then oligarchy might become polity which again went back to democracy and the democracy became the monarchy.

The nature of the polity or characterisation of politics, there in Machiavelli was about the cyclical and circular modes of history rather than the linear movement of history that was there in the Christian theology of thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas. For Machiavelli, this all states were subject to change and he desired the republican rule. And republican rule was when citizens participated and had a say in governing the city. And Italian city-states were those states which derived inspiration from the republican notion of Roman Empire or the Holy Roman Empire. And in governing the states, the citizens played an active role.

Machiavelli wanted republican rule if possible. But if that is not possible because of the fragmented nature of principalities and their constant fighting with each other. Then he favoured the rule by the Prince or one person who could unify Italy and bring back the past glory of the Roman Empire. The overall objective of Machiavelli through his advice to the *Prince* and in *The Discourse* was to bring back that republican form of rule there in the Roman Empire, the rule of the Senate and other Senators in governing the city.

Thus, Machiavelli's political thoughts should be assessed in this context when he wanted the unification of Italy and restoration of the republican form of classical Rome. And in doing so, he devised a different understanding and approach to politics.

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**Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 -1527): Brief Bio-sketch**

- Machiavelli was borne into a middle-class family in Florence in 1469, which was rooted in republican values and humanist ethics. He entered the public life in the Florentine Republic at the age of 29 and, for the next fourteen years, oversaw its various military and diplomatic missions. The experience that he gained during these years was the basis of much of his political thought.
- During the diplomatic career, Machiavelli acquainted with many leaders and rulers such as popes, princes, French king Louis XII, and Roman Emperor, Maximilian. The ruler who influenced him the most was Cesare Borgia. It was his rise and fall that shaped much of his political thought. With the return of the former ruler of Florence, Medici family, in 1512, backed by the pope and the Spanish monarchy, they reestablished their rule, and Machiavelli fell from grace. He was even imprisoned for conspiracy against the Medici rulers. However, he was later released and spent a quiet life in a country house away from active politics.
- Machiavelli regarded writing as inferior to an active life in politics. And his treatise *The Prince* addressed to the prince of Medici family, Lorenzo de' Medici, was to seek their favor to return to the active life in state's affairs. However, nothing came out, and he devoted the rest of his life working on his other treatises.

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Now, we will briefly move to the personal life of Machiavelli before we go onto discuss his ideas on Virtù and Fortuna. Machiavelli was born into a middle class family in Florence in 1469 and this family was rooted in the republican values and humanist ethics of the Italian renaissance. And this influence, it did deal when Machiavelli began to play active role in the politics and his philosophy, and thought. He was someone who had personal experience in the public life of republics.

He entered the public life in the Florentine Republic at the age of 29 and for the next 14 years, he oversaw its various military and diplomatic missions. And the experience that he gained as a diplomat or an administrator was the basis of much of his political thought when we discussed the *Prince* and *Discourse*, we get to know what and how his advice to the ruler and about the governing was rooted in the experience or pragmatic concern of the polity rather than the utopian imagination of ideal thinking about the politics.

During the diplomatic career, Machiavelli acquainted with many leaders and rulers such as Popes, Princes, French King Louis XII and Roman Emperor Maxmilian. The ruler who influenced him the most was Cesare Borgia and it was his rule, and the fall that shaped much of his political thought. Someone who began to think about the rise and fall in the fortune of a

ruler or the governing elite, while looking at this example of the rise and fall of Cesare Borgia.

He was someone who was capable, virtuous, and yet because of the misfortune or unpredictable nature of the fate, he fell from the grace and that becomes the basis of much of his political thinking and theorization. So, with the return of former ruler of Florence, Medici family in 1512 backed by the Pope and Spanish monarchy, they reestablished their rule and Machiavelli fell from the grace.

He was actively participating in the public life of Florence. But when the Medici family, which was the former ruler of Florence came back in 1512 and with the support of Spanish King and the Pope re-established his rule. Machiavelli was not just asked to resign from the post and fell from the grace. But also imprisoned by this new ruler Medici family on the charges of conspiracy against the Medici family.

However, later, he released and the rest of his life he spent on thinking, theorization and writing his political strategies. Machiavelli was someone who regarded the writing as inferior to an active life of active life in politics. And *the Prince* that he wrote was not a kind of philosophical speculation or theorization about the politics. But it was an advice that he wanted to give to the young Prince of Medici family, Lorenzo de' Medici.

And this he wrote with the intention that the new ruler would again give him this scope to or the opportunity to participate in public life. For Machiavelli, political thinking and theorization is not something which he loved to do or wanted to do. He wanted to play an active in the real, practical politics of his time, and the text that he wrote was not published during his lifetime. Both *the Prince* and *the Discourses* were published after his death.

The significance that is associated with Machiavelli and political thought or philosophy is something very unique where the man is someone who want to play an active role in the politics and write the text as a means or an instrument which will allow him to join the active life in the politics. He devoted rest of his time working on other political strategies.

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➤ Machiavelli was a patriot and wanted the unification of Italy under a strong ruler adept in the art and science of statecraft. His political treatises particularly *The Prince*, are written as advice to such a ruler. *The Prince* became the bible of statecraft and continue to inspire the diplomatic exchanges and politics even today. No other text of political philosophy has so decisively influenced the politics and statecraft in the modern world as Machiavelli's *The Prince* has done. There is a new approach to politics regarded as Machiavellian politics.

➤ His famous works are *The Prince* (1513/1531), and *The Discourses on Levi* (1513-17/1531). Both these works were published after his death in 1527. His other lesser-known works are *The Art of War* (1521) and *The History of Florence* (1527). He also wrote a play full of wit and humor and treacherousness of human character *Mandragola* (1518).

➤ However, Machiavelli's *magnum opus* is *The Prince*. It presents him as a ruthless pragmatist who wanted the ruler to govern based on experiences from the past rather than the imagination or conventional Christian pieties. However, we shall see over the course of these three lectures that such caricature of Machiavelli is not just incorrect but does not do justice to his complex thought. Above all, he was a renaissance man and a republican thinker who wanted politics to be in the interest of the people. Such ideas, less discussed, he presents in the *Discourses* to which we return to in the third lecture.

Machiavelli was a patriot and wanted the unification of Italy under a strong ruler who would be adept in the art and science of statecraft. And his whole purpose was the unification of Italy. His political strategies, particularly, *the Prince* are written as and advice to such a ruler who would be adept in the statecraft and unify the Italy, and bring back the republican glory of classical Rome.

*The Prince* became the bible of statecraft and continued to inspire the diplomatic exchanges and politics even today. The pragmatic, real politics in any society even today if you look at the politician and their behaviour are often guided by this Machiavellian practice of outmanoeuvring the opponent through all kind of means that is possible.

That is one dominant view on politics. Of course, there are other ethical, moral approach to the whole idea of politics as the pursuit of common good. However, in Machiavelli, we see politics as something which is what ensuring the order, maintaining the order and sustaining the rule that requires the knowledge of a statecraft. That is something which a ruler will learn by combining the knowledge of history with the practical necessity of a particular moment.

No other text of political philosophy has so decisively influenced the politics and statecraft in the modern world as Machiavelli's, *the Prince* has done. And there is a new approach to the politics regarded as Machiavellian politics in a very crude sense to anything negative about politics, we often characterise as Machiavellian politics.

And Shakespeare and many other literary figures also helped in imagination of Machiavellian politics in this negative light alone. However, he is a complex thinker than this crude

characterisation. His famous work, *The Prince* was written in 1513 and he simultaneously wrote this other equally significant text. But of course, the less discussed and debated particularly when we think about Machiavellian politics in the negative terms.

So, *the Prince* he wrote in 1513 and it was published in 1531 much after his death in 1527 and *the Discourses*, he wrote over the four years between 1513 to 17. It was published in 31. Both these texts were published after his death in 1527 and his other lesser-known works are, *the Art of War* which he wrote in 1521 and *the History of Florence* in 1527. He also wrote a play which was full of wit and humour, and treacherousness of human character which was *Mandragola* in 1518.

And the Shakespeare characterization of murderous Machiavelli in his 'Othello' is derived from this kind of treacherousness teachings or advice or characterization in Machiavellian politics. However, Machiavelli's magnum opus is *the Prince*. And it presents him as the ruthless pragmatist who wanted the ruler to govern based on experience from the past rather than imagination or conventional Christian priests.

*The Prince* is the most widely read text of Machiavelli after *Discourse* which presented him as a pragmatist thinker who wanted his ruler or the King to govern the polity or principalities based on knowledge of history rather than the Christian pieties of conventional ethics.

However, we shall see throughout these three lectures that such crude caricature of Machiavelli is not just incorrect. But it does not do justice to his complex thought. Above all, he was a Renaissance man and republican thinker who wanted politics to be in the interest of the people. Such ideas less discussed, he presented in *the Discourses* to which we return to in the third lecture.

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**Virtu and Fortuna**

- The Machiavellian notion of *virtu* could be best understood in the context of his ideas on *Fortuna* or fortune. He did regard the enormous role *Fortuna* plays in determining the prospects of human efforts. Now, to reduce the role of *Fortuna* in the affairs of life and particularly in maintaining order and stability in the state, Machiavelli wanted his Prince to inculcate *virtu*. He wanted it to be developed both at the individual as well as at the collective level.
- Machiavelli, describing the role of *Fortuna* in human affairs, writes that 'I would compare her (Fortuna) to an impetuous river that, when turbulent, inundates the plains, casts down trees and buildings, removes earth from this side and places it on the other; everyone flees before it; and yet though it is of such a kind, still when it is quiet, men can make provision against it by building dikes and banks, so that when it rises it will either go into a canal, or its rush will not be so wild and dangerous'.
- This concept of *virtu* and *Fortuna* play a central role in the political theory of Machiavelli. One could fathom the meaning and the role of *Fortuna*, which is part of Greek-Roman mythology. However, the Italian term *virtu* that Machiavelli uses is difficult to translate into English. It is different from classical Greek or Roman notion of virtue - like courage, honesty, temperance, or wisdom. It is equally different from conventional Christian morality, virtue, or virtuous life.

Now, we will discuss the idea for *Virtu* and *Fortuna*. The Machiavellian notion of *Virtu* could be best understood in the context of his ideas on *Fortuna*. These two are somewhat interlinked and very difficult to understand *Virtu* separately or separate from his views on *Fortuna* or *Fortune*.

So, he regarded enormous role *Fortuna* plays in determining the prospect of human affairs or human efforts. Now, to reduce the role of *Fortune* or the fate that was an unpredictable, decisive role in determining the prospect of human life or collective endeavours, to reduce that role of unpredictable fate or *Fortuna* in the affairs of life, particularly in maintaining order and stability in the state.

Machiavelli wanted his *Prince* to inculcate *Virtu*. He wanted it to be developed both at the individual as well as the collective level. So, this is something which he argued that *Virtu* should be inculcated both at the individual and collective level.

Machiavelli, describing the role of *Fortuna* in human affairs, writes, "I would compare her which he *Fortuna*, he characterised as a feminine. I would compare her that is *Fortuna* to an impetuous river that when turbulent, inundates the plains, casts down trees and buildings and removes earth from this side and place it on the other, everyone flees before it and yet though it is of such a kind, still when it is quiet, men can make provision against it by building dikes and banks, so that when it rises it will either go into a canal, or its rushes will not be so wild and dangerous".

So, that is the role of Fortuna or Fortune on human affairs. It is like a river with the current or flow of water and when it is turbulent, it is very difficult for the men, no matter how much virtuous, no matter how much efficient or strong to withstand it. However, when the river is calm, the role of human being is to build the dikes or channelize it in such a manner where it can be used for agriculture or for other productive purposes, and also when it overflows its devastating effect would be less. That is what he thinks of Fortuna and the role of Fortuna in human endeavours.

Particularly, when he explains the fate of Cesare Borgia. He was the strong, effective ruler and yet he ended up falling from the grace and losing the respect or glory which he earned. That could be partly explained because of the devastating role of the Fortuna. So, the concept of Virtue and Fortuna played a central role in the political theory or philosophy of Machiavelli. One could fathom the meaning of the role of Fortuna which is the part of Greek, Roman mythology as well. However, the Italian term Virtu that Machiavelli uses is difficult to translate into English.

It is not Virtu or Virtuous or moral action. So, it is different from the classical Greek and Roman notion of virtue like courage, honesty, temperance or wisdom. It is equally different from conventional Christian morality, virtue or virtuous life. His conception of Virtu is an Italian term that is very different from the conventional, or Christian understanding of virtuous life, honesty, wisdom, and temperance.

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- Cicero, the lawmaker of Rome, advised the rulers to be honest with everyone in all contexts. Machiavelli questions it. He also refuted Christian theological understanding of virtue or fate as pre-ordained to which men must submit to.
- Virtu in the Machiavellian sense must be understood in a moral or ethical neutral sense, which brings the qualities of boldness, steadfastness, cunningness together. He regarded virtu as the basis for stability and order in the state or principalities for which Prince must prepare. The fate of a ruler rest half on his efforts or virtu and another half on Fortuna, which he regarded as feminine and unpredictable.
- According to Machiavelli, it is through virtu that the objective conditions must be exploited by the rulers to bring fortune or glory for himself and his principalities. His views on virtu may appear akin to Aristotle's views on the political judgement. But the difference between the two is that political judgement requires the knowledge of ethics and should be combined with the pragmatic wisdom that is acquired through experience. However, Machiavelli refutes any such transcendental notion of ethics that could help the ruler to assess or foresee the unfolding political developments and respond to them correctly.

Cicero was the lawmaker of Greece, advised his rulers to be honest with everyone in all the context. A ruler needs to be virtuous, now, Machiavelli questioned such advice to the ruler and refuted the Christian theological understanding of Virtù or fate as pre-ordained to which men must subject to or submit to.

Both Cicero or the classical Roman understanding of the Christian theological understanding of virtue, Machiavelli refuted. For him, virtue in the Machiavellian sense must be understood in a moral or ethical neutral sense. And this neutrality about the moral and ethical ideas, particularly in the Christian theology and in the Greek or classical Roman period. This idea of Virtù is neutral to such moral-ethical connotation.

Virtù in the Machiavellian sense must be understood in a moral and ethical neutral sense which brings the qualities of boldness, steadfastness and cunningness together. So, cunningness is like the idea of fox and boldness or steadfastness is that of a lion. A ruler or a Prince must be bold like a lion and cunning like a fox and Virtù that he was trying to argue or define is a combination of all this ability of boldness, steadfastness and cunningness together.

He regarded Virtù as the basis for stability and order in the state or principalities for which the Prince must prepare. So, the requirement of the Prince or the ruler is to develop this Virtù. The virtue of boldness, steadfastness and the cunningness. Now, the fate of a ruler according to Machiavelli rest half on his efforts or Virtù that is the qualities of being bold, steadfastness and cunning. And another half of his fate is dependent on the Fortuna which he regarded as feminine and unpredictable.

According to Machiavelli, it is through Virtù that the objective conditions must be exploited by the rulers to bring fortune or glory for himself and his principality. So, the Virtù is the ability of the ruler to exploit the objective condition.

Now, it is the toughest task for individual and those who are rulers. It often happens that in our life, it becomes easy to think or reflect on the past and also have some vague sense of the future. But the toughest or most difficult part is to understand the present, necessity of the present and then acting upon that present moment which will determine our future.

So, even in the Lincoln idea, if you think Abraham Lincoln when he was trying to abolish slavery and there was the competing position within his party and among the opposition. He was someone who was arguing that America was going through the civil war and to prevent this civil war and to ensure justice, it is necessary to abolish slavery.



Now, that was argument which only he could see and had to face opposition from his own party members and from the opposition. Yet his sense prevailed which led to a new era in American politics. Of course, there is constant search for justice, equality and actual justice in the society.

So, the point I am trying to make here is that the virtue for Machiavelli is that ability in the rulers which allow them to understand the objective condition and exploit it for his glory and the stability in his principalities. This you can compare with Aristotle's idea of political judgement which is the combination of knowledge of ethics which is general and practical wisdom that individual gains through experience.

The public political life is necessary to have the correct political judgement, according to Aristotle. However, in his political judgement, the rule of ethics in general and it is very crucial and the political judgement nonetheless requires the knowledge of pragmatic politics or pragmatic experience.

But the difference between these two that Machiavellian Virtù and Aristotle's political judgement is that in Aristotle, there is a kind of transcendental, universal sense of ethics or justice. However, Machiavelli refuted any such transcendental notion of ethics that could help the ruler to assess or foresee the unfolding political developments and responded to them correctly. Thus, the Virtù is something very different from the transcendental or conventional notion of ethics and justice.

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➤ *Virtù* requires the ruler to be wise and knowledgeable in history and adapt to the changing circumstances. Thus prudence, accompanied by critical foresight and intuitive grasp of the situation, and not the moral worth of an action, is the characteristic of Machiavellian *virtù*.

➤ According to Machiavelli, political *virtù* lies in seizing the moment, as nothing is fixed or still in politics, through the combined application of prudence, efficiency, and flexibility. Thus the necessity of the moment and nothing else should guide the political action of the rulers, and his *virtù* lies in identifying or foreseeing the moments and responding to them accordingly.

➤ Machiavelli argues that *virtù*, as an attribute, applies to both individuals and the community as a whole. In the *Prince*, he focuses more upon the *virtù* at the individual level, i.e., the prince or king. However, in the *Discourses*, he focuses on the collective or civic *virtù* of the people for the order and justice in the state. Lack of such *virtù*, according to Machiavelli, resulted in political instabilities and degeneration of Roman city-states. Having the cyclical understanding of history, Machiavelli was also aware that whatever the *virtù* of the ruler or the ruled, *Fortuna* cannot be fully tamed.

Virtu requires the ruler to be wise and knowledgeable in history and adapt to the changing circumstances. So, politics is something which is constantly changing and a wise and knowledgeable ruler should know how to respond to these changing circumstances. And that he can do when he or she knows the history.

The approach to politics in Machiavelli is therefore historical and empirical. And Virtù requires the ruler to have the knowledge of both the empirical circumstances as it unfolds and the historical knowledge to respond to them appropriately or accordingly.

So, the prudence, thus, accompanied by critical foresight and intuitive grasp of the situation or the moment and not the moral worth of an action is the characteristic of Machiavellian Virtù. It is the prudence, critical foresight and intuitive grasp of the situation that makes a leader true leader with the Virtù, to understand the objective condition and respond to them accordingly.

According to Machiavelli, political Virtù lies in seizing the moment that is the most important thing for a ruler as nothing is fixed or is still in politics as I said nothing is permanent, things are constantly at flux. So, how a politician or a ruler understand these changing circumstances and responded to them accordingly and such responses will determine the fate and outcome, and the glory for that particular ruler or politician and for the principalities he holds.

So, political Virtù for Machiavelli lies in seizing the moment, as nothing is fixed or still in politics through the combined application of prudence, efficiency and flexibility. Nothing is

permanent, you wanted the ruler or the king to be flexible, to have the Virtù of a lion and also the fox. Thus, the necessity of the moment and nothing else should guide the political action of the rulers and his Virtù lies in identifying or foreseeing the moment and responding to them accordingly.

So, the idea of Virtù in Machiavelli is about the ability of the ruler to foresee the event and prepare accordingly to respond to them accordingly. Machiavelli argues that Virtù as an attribute applies to both individuals and the community as a whole. In *the Prince*, he focuses more on the Virtù at the individual level, the Prince or the King.

However, in *Discourses*, he focuses on the collective or civic Virtù of the people for order and justice in the state and to ensure the liberty is for the individual. So, lack of such Virtù, according to Machiavelli, particularly to the political and military Virtù which was lacking among the citizens when Machiavelli was trying to unify or arguing about the unification of Italian principalities.

He believed that lack of such Virtù, political, or military resulted in the political instabilities and degeneration of Roman city-states. So, having the cyclical understanding of history, Machiavelli was aware that whatever the Virtù of the ruler or the ruled, Fortuna cannot be fully tamed. It will remain the other half which seeps the human endeavours and the condition of polity and principalities.

So, to conclude, the Machiavellian understanding of Virtù is to be seen in the context of Fortuna which play a decisive role in human endeavours and human efforts to govern their life to achieve certain political objectives.

Now, what is left for individual rulers or the republics as a whole to do is to develop certain capacity, boldness, and cunningness to minimise the influence of Fortuna and that can be done by inculcating the Virtù. In the case of principalities, it has to be a Prince who is prudent enough and have an intuitive knowledge of the situation, and how to respond to them accordingly.

In the case of Republic, citizen as a whole should develop that Virtù. The civic Virtù to govern their collective life. But no matter how much one is capable or have Virtù or political or military Virtù, the fate or Fortuna and its role cannot be fully tamed. It will yet defy the preparedness or the Virtù of the rulers for the citizens and can determine the fate, that is kind

of cyclical views about the history or the nature of polity that Machiavelli had which was different from the linear understanding in the Christian theology.

I hope you get to know from today's lecture about Machiavelli's political and intellectual context. How he defined politics as pragmatic and empirical science about politics which is different from the utopian and ideological imagination of politics, and his views on Virtù and Fortuna.

In the next lecture, we are going to discuss his views on Prince or how to govern principalities, the hereditary rule of the King who acquired principality based on his abilities. So, the advice that he gave to the Prince, we will move to discuss in the next lecture.

And in the final lecture, we are going to discuss his views on *Discourses* and how to govern a republic. Thus, the republican ideals of Machiavelli's political philosophy, we are going to discuss the third lecture.

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For today's lecture, you can refer to some of the texts like David Boucher and Paul Kelly's *Political Thinkers*. Gary Browning's text is also a good text to understand the interpretation of Machiavellian thought: *A History of Modern Political Thought: The Question of Interpretation*. You can refer to Murray, Forsyth and Maurice Keens Soper's, *A Guide to Political Classics: Plato to Aristotle*. Shefali, Jha's, *Western Political Thought* and Alan James Ryan's, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*.

So, these are some of the texts, you can refer to understand Machiavelli's political, intellectual context and his views on Virtù and Fortuna. That is all in today's lecture. Thanks for listening. Thank you all.