MORALITY IN
MACHIAVELLI, HOBBES AND LOCKE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study moves from the contention that morality is a political concept par excellence. In other words, this study is built on the presumption that social and political analysis of what is goes hand in hand with a concern with what ought to be, and that when at stake are the matters of socio-political life, the two are interwoven. This conviction to the importance of morality for political analysis, in turn, fuels the curiosity about the different ways in which this tense relationship has been handled by the important figures of political thought. It is out of this curiosity that this article focuses on the views of Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who are usually listed in chronological order as the founders of modern political thought, on the question of morality or more specifically on the relationship between politics and morality. The comparative analysis in this study shows that these three important figures do not have much in common in terms of their conception of morality, that is, in terms of the ways they chose to deal with this question and in terms of their particular propositions as to what is or is not to be accepted as moral. However, one thing is common: the issue of morality is at the very center of their theoretical frameworks interconnected with their arguments regarding other crucial concepts of their analyses, like for instance, human nature, state, individual/community relationship, authority, and power.

Keywords: *Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, morality, morality and politics.*

(Machiavelli, Hobbes ve Locke'ta Ahlak: Karşılaştırmalı Bir İnceleme)

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın çıkış noktasını ahlak kavramının politik bir kavram olduğu önermesi oluşturmaktadır. Diğer bir ifadeyle, toplumsal ve siyasal yaşama dair meseleler söz konusu olduğunda "nedir" sorusuna verilen yanıtlarla "nasıl olmalıdır" sorusuna verilen yanıtlar iç içe geçmiş durumdadır. Toplumsal ve siyasal olaylar karşısında bu soru üzerine inşa edilen bir ilgi/merak/dikkat/kaygı asla küçümsenesi bir şey olmamakla birlikte, "ne olmalı/nasıl olmalı" sorusunun önemsiz/değersiz/anlamsız bir soru olduğu sonucuna yol açmamalıdır. Klasik siyasal düşüncenin en önemli ve etkili isimlerinden olan, hatta çoğu zaman modern siyasi düşüncenin kurucuları olarak sırayla isimleri zikredilen, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes ve John Locke'un eserleri incelendiğinde de ahlak konusunun son derece merkezi bir konumda olduğu görülmektedir. Bu konumun ortaya konulması bu makalenin ilk amacı olarak sayılabilir. Bu üç politik düşünürün ahlaki soruları ele alış biçimleri ve/ya da "ne olmalı" sorusuna verdikleri yanıtlar bakımından farklılıkları, benzerliklerinden daha fazla olduğu öne sürülebilir. Ancak, hepsinin ortak noktası, ahlak konusuna yaklaşımlarının, üzerine yazdıkları diğer siyasi kavramları (devlet, birey, otorite, insan doğası, iktidar gibi) nasıl düşündükleriyle doğrudan ilintili olmasıdır. Ahlak konusunun siyasal düşüncenin en önemli isimleri açısından önemini ortaya koymanın yanı sıra, bu makale bu üç düşünürün konuya yaklaşımlarını karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısıyla ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, ahlak, ahlak-siyaset ilişkisi*

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Introduction

This study moves from the contention that morality is a political concept *par excellence*. In other words, this study is built on the presumption that social and political analysis of *what is* goes hand in hand with a concern with *what ought to be*, and that when at stake are the matters of socio-political life, the two are interwoven. This conviction to the importance of morality for political analysis, in turn, fuels the curiosity about the different ways in which this tense relationship has been handled by the important figures of political thought. It is out of this curiosity that this article focuses on the views of Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who are usually listed in chronological order as the founders of modern political thought, on the question of morality or more specifically on the relationship between politics and morality. The vast literature dedicated to an analysis of the works of these great thinkers is indeed an indication of the fact that for those who are dealing virtually with the same questions as they did some hundred years ago, their writings are anything but irrelevant.

This being its point of departure, this article aims at a comparative analysis of the different conceptions of morality in Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke. Through this analysis, it tries, in the first place, to show the different ways in which they tackled with this issue as well as the interesting parallelisms between them. More than that, however, it tries to demonstrate the centrality of morality in their political thought by delineating the connections between conceptualization of morality and other central political themes such as the state, human nature, power and individual/community relationship.

Machiavelli: 'Moral', 'Immoral' or 'Amoral'?

There is a widespread agreement today that Machiavelli stands outside the main tradition of European political thought. He is different in the way he thinks and talks about society from great medieval thinkers and from the great thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Plamenatz points out, both the Medieval political theory, and the political theory of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were rooted in theology and hence the main question those thinkers dealt with was that of 'What is the essential nature of man?' which was equivalent to ask 'What are God's intentions/purposes for him?'[1] In Machiavelli's conception on the other hand, man is self-assertive. He lives not to seek God's favor or to serve some larger purpose than human purpose, but to satisfy himself; he seeks to make himself felt.[2] As is known, Western civilization, up to modernity, developed within a moral environment shaped by

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[1] John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Political and Social Theories From Machiavelli to Marx*, revised by M.E. Plamenatz and R.Wokler, (London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1992) p.36-37.
[2] Ibid.

Christianity and its ethics. Different from this tradition, Machiavelli builds his morality on the claim that individuals can never escape worldly affairs and therefore tries to provide them with tools for acting in always changing times. His morality is a this-worldly morality; its rules are centred on individual and his actions. This is the radical newness of Machiavellian morality for those times. Althusser highlights this novelty as the most startling aspect of Machiavelli's work:

> Machiavelli is the theorist of something new solely because he is the theorist of beginnings of the beginning… The novelty of the beginning thus grips us for two reasons: because of the contrast between the after and the before, the new and old; and because of their opposition and their impact, their rupture… If he is gripping, it is not simply because he is new, but because he represents a beginning.[3]

Machiavelli himself writes on the first page of *Discourses*:

> Although the envious nature of men has always made it no less perilous to discover new methods and institutions than to search for unknown lands and seas… nevertheless I have resolved to enter upon a path still untrodden, though it may bring me distress and difficulty.[4]

He explains the originality of his work as his effort to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations;[5] and he criticizes the former views for not following the same path. He accuses them of being interested in imagining many "Republics and Princedoms that have never been seen or known to exist in reality" because he believes that "how men live is so different from how they should live."[6]

The novelty of Machiavelli's work is generally viewed as an outcome of the special and extraordinary conjunction of events of his time. Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469 and died there in 1527. So, he was at the very heart of Renaissance, both geographically and temporally. Renaissance, as a bridge between middle ages and modern times, is characterized by an intellectual and spiritual renewal on the one hand, and religious and political turmoil on the other hand. Both seem to have a formative influence on his thought. What make this period so progressive from today's point of view are the radical changes in the social and material conditions of living such as the development of trade, the rise of a capitalist class and the cities, the early stages of capitalist mode of production and the loosening of the ties of feudalism. These changes in turn paved the way for a change in the ways of thinking and behaving as epitomized

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[3] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, F. Matheron (ed.) London, New York: Verso, 1999), pp. 6-7.
[4] Quoted in Althusser, ibid.
[5] Niccolo Machiavelli, *Prince*, Chp. XV in J. Losco and L. Williams (eds.), Political Theory Classical Writings Contemporary Views (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.185. References to Prince in this study are to the extracts in this book.
[6] Machiavelli, *Prince*, Chp. XV

in the emergence of the notion of "individual" as able to create new things as well as to change the world around himself/herself on the one hand, and of the idea of an unlimited space as opposed to the closed image of the world of middle ages, on the other hand.

Machiavelli now has a worldwide reputation as an "immoral" and the term "Machiavellian" has a pejorative connotation. Indeed, as Plamenatz argues, "he was also concerned that men should behave well, but he had different ideas about what constitutes good behaviour. By our standards he sometimes was immoral; but he had his own standards which mattered as much to him as ours do to us."[7] In this sense, it would not be accurate to say that Machiavelli sought to detach politics from morality by arguing that morality has no role in shaping political action. Rather, as will be seen below, it seems to be the case that he strived to apply a new morality, which he calls *virtù*, to politics as against the deeply rooted tradition of religious ethics. A major reason why Machiavelli is known as an immoral is his endeavour to tackle with the question of good behaviour without reference to God. The crucial feature of his morality is his conceptualization of the individual in his/her relation with nature instead of with God. In this respect, the relationship he established between the concepts of *fortune, nature* and *virtù* is the key to his theory of morality.

As Neal Wood states, Machiavelli gives different meanings to *virtù* which creates an ambiguity since it is difficult to reconcile them by a single comprehensive meaning: he sometimes uses *virtù* as virtue, in opposition to vice; it sometimes stands for bravery and valour, sometimes he uses it as if it were the Latin *virtus,* energy of will, manliness, excellence and the plural of *virtù* to correspond with the Latin plural *virtutes*, good actions or qualities.[8] However, Wood argues that Machiavelli's most frequent antonym of *virtù* is fortune (*fortuna*). Machiavelli defines fortune as the part of nature that man cannot fully control. According to him, one must try his/her best to overcome fortune and stop depending on it, because he believes that "fortune is the arbiter of half of our actions, but it lets us control roughly the other half" and "fortune shows its powers where no force has been organized to resist it."[9] Therefore, the individual can and should strive to win over fortune, which in turn necessitates that individuals endlessly adapt and struggle to change fortune by assuming various different attitudes. It can be inferred, then, that Machiavelli rejects the existence of a stable and previously known path to happiness or perfection, which is the case in religious ethics. Rather, he suggests a dynamic adaptation of human nature to ever shifting circumstances …. So, the tactics and strategies as well as the surrounding way of thinking, seem to be what Machiavelli calls *virtù*. In this conception, *virtù* comes to mean a learning process through which individuals improve themselves through experience rather than a standard

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[7] Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, p.79.
[8] Neal Wood, "Machiavelli's Concept of Virtu Reconsidered", *Political Studies*, 15 (2): 159-172.
[9] Machiavelli, *Prince*, Chp. XXV.

scheme of morally-good and morally-wrong conducts. Regarding the rulers, for instance, he argues that it would be most praiseworthy for a ruler to have all the qualities that are held to be good; but since it is not possible to have all of them and since circumstances would not permit living a completely virtuous life, they should be prepared to change their actions according to circumstances.[10]

The main idea behind this concern with the struggle against fortune is Machiavelli's search for a strong political community. This is why, he "was not interested in an eternal or universal morality; he approved the most strongly the moral qualities that make political societies strong and individuals enterprising, bold and public-spirited"; and, this is why he disliked some of the qualities most admired by a whole-hearted Christian such as humility, asceticism, patience under injustice, and approved of ambition: because the state needs strong men according to him.[11] What underlies this understanding is his emphasis on a strong sense of public duty and readiness to make great sacrifices for the community from motives of honor and patriotism. The strong individuals which a strong political community needs in turn are those who can manipulate the traditional values as best as they can in order to adapt to the circumstances and thereby reach unity, order and stability. Consequently, Machiavelli argues that a ruler should try to cling to the traditional moral values if/when he can but should not hesitate to deviate from them when it is necessary to do so.[12] It follows from this that his conception of morality is characterized by an instrumental approach to religion and religious morality in that he is concerned with religion to the extent that it has an influence on political and social behaviour. Meinecke points out that Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* embraces ethical qualities but it was fundamentally intended to portray the strength for great political and warlike achievements, and strength for the founding and preservation of states, particularly republics.[13] Therefore, it embraced civic virtues, readiness to devote oneself to common good as well as the wisdom, energy and ambition of the great founders and rulers of states.[14] These remarks should be understood in conjunction with the essential moral role he feels the state plays in man's life, since he considers the state necessary for human happiness.[15] The underlying presumption here is his rather negative view of human nature: "Whoever desires to found a state and give it laws must start with assuming that all men are bad

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[10] Machiavelli, *Prince*, Chp. XV.

[11] Plamenatz, ibid., pp.67-69.

[12] Machiavelli, *Prince,* Chp. XV. He gives the examples of "being merciful" and "keeping his word" for such situations. If the conditions are conducive, that is if there is no danger for the unity of the state and for the order and stability of the community a ruler should be merciful and should keep his word to his people. These are two important values in traditional morality. However, if a necessity arises he should not hesitate to act in opposition to these values.

[13] Friedrick Meinecke, "Machiavelli" in F. Meinecke, *Machiavellism*, trans. D. Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p.408.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Mortimer J. Adler and Peter Wolff, *The Development of Political Theory and Government*, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1959) p. 95.

and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever they may find occasion for it."[16]

The above review of Machiavelli's approach shows that he really challenged the dominant position held by Christian ethics in the political life of his time. It also shows that his approach was built on pragmatism and adaptability. Whether this makes him moral, immoral or amoral, however, is still a complicated matter. From a point of view, he was arguing that "the state needed a morality of its own, the morality of success: success in defending itself and thus guaranteeing the safety of its people."[17] Althusser, on the other hand, argues that Machiavelli seeks proof of the need to subordinate morality to politics and that "he seeks not virtue but virtu which has nothing moral about it for it exclusively designates the exceptional political ability and intellectual power of the Prince."[18] This study intentionally stays out of this controversy since it seems to be more fruitful to concentrate on what this important figure of political thought said and why he said it, rather than trying to label him.

Hobbesian Moral Theory

Thomas Hobbes was born in 1588, sixty-one years after the death of Machiavelli. He lived for ninety-one years and died in 1679. His lifetime encompassed one of the most turbulent periods in English history. He was born during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and lived through the reigns of James I, Charles I, through the period of the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell and on into the reign of Charles II.[19] Hobbes is one of the greatest philosophers of state and law but, as in the case of Machiavelli, he is often remembered in relation with the debate revolving around the concept of morality. As will be seen in due course, there are several other parallelisms between Machiavelli and Hobbes in terms of their system of thought.

As was mentioned above, the 17th century had been preceded by great upheavals in the realm of politics and economics as well as in that of thought and religion. Added to the examples such as the invention of printing, overseas discoveries, and new astronomical theories of Copernicus producing a complete change in current ideas and customs, there was the influence of the new experimental science giving way to a more empirical, critical way of thinking.[20] A powerful movement towards freedom had begun with the Italian Renaissance and the Reformation of Luther had weakened the authority of the Pope without

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[16] Machiavelli, *Discourses* Book 1 Chapter 3 quoted in Adler and Wolff, ibid, p. 90.

[17] J. R. Hale quoted in Adrian Little, John Gingell and Christopher Winch, *Modern Political Thought: A Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

[18] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, p. 51.

[19] Mortimer J. Adler and Peter Wolff, *The Development of Political Theory and Government*, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1959) p.101

[20] Z. Lubienski, "Hobbes' Philosophy and Its Historical Background" in Preston King (ed.) *Thomas Hobbes: Critical Assessments Vol.1 Background: Texts and Contexts*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.3

replacing it, however, with an alternative cohesive system of dogmas. This, in turn, caused a dividing up of Christianity into several sects leading to confusion, disputes and finally to religious wars throughout Europe. As a result, there arose a desire among the intellectuals of the time to find a common platform on which all people could meet and to establish the fundamental truths. Passmore draws attention to the outburst of moral theorizing in the Britain of the 17th and 18th centuries and argues that "such a phenomenon is inevitable when the accepted criteria of moral conduct are no longer acceptable, and the more so when even the code itself has become a subject of dispute."[21] Moreover, although it was clear that the old order in politics, in religion and in human culture generally was breaking down, it was not clear that any new order was going to take its place.[22] In this context, there was an endeavor among the intellectuals to establish morals without any reference to religion. Among these figures, Hobbes played the most important part. All the struggles and controversies mentioned above inspired his thought. At a time of general dissolution and confusion, when religious principles were losing their hold on people, Hobbes considered it to be his mission to expand and motivate the importance of civic duties. Consequently, all his work aimed at the restoration of order and at the exaltation of governmental authority.[23] As Lubienski observes, after that period of troubles, in nearly all countries absolutism was installed and few thinkers had foreseen this. Machiavelli and Hobbes were two of them. They both stressed the importance of the unity of the state for order and stability. These are important parallelisms between Machiavelli and Hobbes.

It can be argued that Hobbes' thought represents a great effort to build ethics and the theory of the state on a basis without resorting to religious principles of morality and the laws of God. This is perhaps the most important point of convergence between Hobbes and Machiavelli who, as was explained above, also endavoured to develop such a system of morality. Moreover, as in the case of Machiavelli, Hobbes' attitude towards God becomes clear only when it is considered in relation with his ideas about human nature. Also, in both cases assumptions about human nature and conceptions of morality are interconnected. On human nature, Hobbes argues that man is driven by his passions. However, contrary to the common view about Hobbes, he does not talk about an essential wickedness of man[24] and in that respect he is different from Machiavelli who claims "men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature whenever they find occasion for it." Hobbes, in his turn says, "the desires and other passions of man are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those

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[21] J.A. Passmore, "The Moral Philosophy of Hobbes" in Preston King (ed.) *Thomas Hobbes: Critical Assessments Vol.2 Ethics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.41
[22] Ibid.
[23] Lubienski, "Hobbes' Philosophy and Its Historical Background", p.6
[24] Ibid. p.176

passions, till they know a law that forbids them."[25] He thinks that reason and passion together take man out of his natural state: "And thus much for the ill condition which men by mere nature is actually placed in; though with a possibility to come out of it, consisting partly in the passions, partly in his reason."[26]

This formulation is closely related to Hobbes' attitude towards God and it also distinguishes Hobbes' theory from the traditional accounts of natural law of his time. As is known, those traditional accounts viewed the laws of nature as the laws of God and therefore valid in both the state of nature as well as political society. This in turn depended on the assumption that men, through their reason, would discover these laws and obey them, because this obligation meant obedience to God's will. Hobbes differs from these accounts since he claims that reason does not infer the laws of nature from the nature of man or from God's purposes for men. Rather, for him, individuals discover, by reflecting on their own experience, that if they are to have peace they ought to observe certain rules in their dealings with other individuals. Plamenatz explains Hobbes' peculiar attitude towards God in quite an interesting way:

> Hobbes did not leave God out of his picture of the world, but he did give the impression that he had first painted the picture without God, and had then put God in afterwards, to save the appearances... Hobbes was saying that men could, by their own devices, get for themselves all the happiness they wanted.[27]

This view is supported by Hobbes' assertion that there are two important forces in human nature: the love of power and the fear of violent death.[28] These two, in a sense, balance one another, because only fear, among the passions of men, is strong enough to overcome the love of power thereby making social life possible.[29] In a similar vein Lubienski argues that the foundation for Hobbesian ethics is the idea of the furtherance of life: "life itself is that supreme good, to the fullest realization of which all mankind, whether consciously or unconsciously, tends."[30] According to him, Hobbes admitted that all other tendencies (e.g. the desire to help others, to give in to them etc.) had to be subordinated. Hobbes based his conception of morality on the formulation of rules that individuals must follow in order to maintain their lives and also to maintain the necessary means of its preservation.[31] In a similar line of thinking, Ackerman argues that moral goodness of an action in Hobbes' theory depends upon whether it

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[25] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch.13. The quotations from Hobbes and Leviathan are taken from J.Losco and L.Williams (eds.) *Political Theory: Classic Writings, Contemporary Views*, (NewYork: St. Martin's Press, 1992)
[26] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch.13
[27] Plamenatz, Ibid. p.177
[28] Passmore, Ibid. pp.43-44
[29] Passmore, Ibid.
[30] Lubienski, Ibid. p.7
[31] Ibid.

contributes to the preservation and general well-being of the agent.[32] Another parallelism between Hobbes and Machiavelli can easily be observed here: Both were concerned with morality in connection with public-political life and not in connection with morality of individuals in their private lives.

Hobbes' theory of the state is based on the idea that if self-preservation and consequently the fear of death are the main concerns for - human beings, it is necessary for them to get organized under the authority of the state by committing the power to a sovereign. Warrender argues that Hobbes is a moralist at least in this sense, that is, in proposing that they ought to obey the sovereign.[33] As was explained above, the same can be said of Machiavelli. It can be asked at this point whether it is mere fear that lies behind Hobbes' formulation of 'consent' since fear can also be seen as an anti-social motive which would cause men to flee each other. An important distinction should be made in response to such a claim: the fear that Hobbes talks about is not the fear of others or of the sovereign power; it is the fear of what would happen if sovereign power is weakened through constant disobedience.[34] The conditions which would emerge when there is no sovereign power to which all individuals commit their particular sovereignty is the most famous part of Hobbes' theory: the state of nature in which all men are at a constant war with each other. It follows from this that it is moral for the individuals to surrender their power of deciding what is good and what is evil to the sovereign so that in the end it is to the sovereign will that they must appeal in matters of morality.[35]

An inseparable part of Hobbes' conception of morality is his strive to apply the geometrical method to his analyses. His method was based on the principle that a distinct knowledge of the nature of human actions is necessary to reach general rules of conduct. He wanted to develop clear and settled definitions of terms just as in geometry or Copernican astronomy from which the whole system was to be inferred.[36] He says:

> For were the nature of human actions as distinctly known, as the nature of quantity in geometrical figures, the strength of avarice and ambition which is sustained by the erroneous opinions of the vulgar, as touching the nature of right and wrong, would presently faint and languish, and mankind should enjoy such an immortal peace that there would hardly be any pretence for war.[37]

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[32] T.F. Ackerman, "Two Concepts of Moral Goodness in Hobbes' Ethics" in Preston King (ed.) *Thomas Hobbes: Critical Assessments Vol.2 Ethics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) pp.273-274

[33] H.Warrender, "Hobbes' Conception of Morality" Preston King (ed.) *Thomas Hobbes: Critical Assessments Vol.2 Ethics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p.131

[34] Passmore, Ibid. p.45

[35] Passmore, Ibid. p.47

[36] G.A.J. Rogers, "Hobbes' Hidden İnfluence" in G.A.J. Rogers and A.Ryan (eds.) *Perspectives on Hobbes* , (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) pp.197-198

[37] Hobbes, *De Cive* , quoted in Ibid. p.198

It can be argued that Hobbes wanted men to obey the sovereign's will on the issue of what is right and wrong because he thought that the sovereign would have the distinct knowledge about human nature and consequently about the moral laws of good conduct. In sum then, Hobbes' moral theory depends on the assumption that the basic passion that drives men's actions is the need for self-preservation and the moral goodness of an action is decided by looking at whether it contributes to that end or not. What follows from this premise is that since the state of nature is a condition of war of all against all it is not conducive to self-preservation and hence there is a need for a sovereign power which in turn constitutes the central premise of his state theory. At this point, an important difference between Machiavelli and Hobbes appears: Although they converge in their emphasis on the strength of a sovereign power, Hobbes' stress on self preservation puts him in a different place than Machiavelli. Hobbes underlines the sovereign power as the necessary medium of security and self preservation, the conditions of which individuals are not capable of creating. For Machiavelli, however, the ultimate aim is the power of the state per se. In other words, for Machiavelli, strengthening the state and the sovereign is an end in itself not a means to another end.

Two further similarities between Machiavelli and Hobbes in terms of their moral theories should be mentioned at this point: First, neither Machiavelli nor Hobbes did trust so much on the individual. Indeed, both of them were against the exaggeration of the individual and his powers, which was, however, the dominant trend in the intellectual life of both the Renaissance and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Second, it can easily be observed that both Machiavelli and Hobbes took it granted that human beings want self-preservation, security and peace. Both of them took this assumption as their starting point and tried to build their understandings of what is 'morally good' and what is 'morally wrong' by making reference to this central premise.

The Structure Of Locke's Moral Theory:

John Locke is referred mostly as a proponent of a natural law theory of ethics and politics. Although there is no agreement on whether Locke's texts reveal a coherent moral theory, Simmons points out that there is a constant effort on the part of Locke in moral philosophy and that nearly all of his works are concerned in one way or another with morality.[38] The basic principles of his moral theory are laid down especially in *Second Treatise of Government* and *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

A good starting point for an analysis of the structure of Locke's moral theory is his notorious claim that morals are as demonstrable as mathematics. Yet, it should also be stated that, ironically enough, the idea of God and a parallel understanding of natural law is as central to his morality. This means

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[38] J.A. Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.19.

that the ultimate source of morality is God and God has given to man a law whereby men should govern themselves which is the law of nature. That law is the fundamental law of morality. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke clarifies the relations between law and morality and the meaning of moral good and evil and he offers claims about why we ought to obey God's command. He also declares that morality is the proper science and business of humankind in general. Following a similar line of thinking with Hobbes, he thought that it is possible to reason demonstratively and reach certainty in the area of morality like in mathematics.[39] For Locke, a systematic, demonstrative science is possible only where the necessary connections between things are revealed. It is important to lay out ideas in the right order so that it becomes possible to see the meaning connections they have with one another. "Instead of using figures and diagrams we must calculate using words. But as in mathematics, it is important that we define these words to make clear the ideas which they refer.[40] Thus, the reason why he handles moral ideas such as property, government, and injustice is because he is trying to show that moral ideas have clarity and adequacy sufficient to make a demonstrative science of ethics possible. His method is a deductive one and starts with the claim that there exists a God. The existence of God and the acknowledgement of his existence are taken for granted by Locke. He argues that "from the regularity and perfection of nature and from human nature it is undoubtedly inferred that there must be a powerful and wise creator of all these things... Our faculties plainly discover to us the being of a God, and the knowledge of ourselves, enough to lead us into a full and clear discovery of our duty".[41] The form of the demonstration of morality then becomes as follows[42]:

1. our senses (with reason) reveal the existence of God

2. our senses (with reason) reveal the existence of ourselves as the creatures of God. This comes out as a result of the principle that something cannot be produced by nothing.

3. it also follows from the principle that nothing cannot produce something that since we have perception and knowledge, then that being which has created us also must have perception and knowledge.

4. the relation of God to man grounds a duty for man to do God's will. That is God has a right to be obeyed.

5. From the principle of God's will and empirical condition of human life (revealed by our senses) our specific moral duties follow. In other words, it is self-evident that a wise, good creator who has a right to be obeyed would issue laws and would do so in the way needed for

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[39] For the details of Locke's method see G. Fuller, R.Stecker, and J.P. Wright, *John Locke An essay Concerning Human Understanding In Focus*, (Routledge: London and NY, 2000), pp.10-13
[40] Fuller, Stecker and Wright, ibid., p.11
[41] Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, pp. 22-23.
[42] Simmons, ibid., pp. 22-23; Fuller, Stecker,Wright, ibid., p.11

the laws to motivate us to obey them- by attaching rewards for obedience and penalties for disobedience.

The answer to the question 'what is the source of moral authority' is self-evident in the demonstration above: the source of moral authority is God and his divine law. Actually in Locke's writings one comes across three different kinds of law: divine law (with God's sanctions), civil law (with legal sanctions), and the law of opinion (with social sanctions). These may seem as three different sources of moral authority, but Locke makes it clear that the source of moral authority is divine law and it determines moral obligations. The other laws, even though they are backed by very real sanctions obligate us only insofar as God's law allows it. Locke accepts that these different sources may often coincide in their claims, but they do not always do so. And if they do not coincide, this poses a problem for Locke; one that he solves by claiming that divine law is the only source of moral authority. This is the major difference of Locke's conception of morality from both Machiavelli and Hobbes.

His solution, however, leads one to ask whether Locke embraces a sanction theory of obligation with regard to God's law. According to him, God has a special authority over man because he is the creator of men. Men are his property and this establishes the uniqueness of our obligations to God. There are three important remarks that need to be highlighted here: First, it follows from God's right of creation and his special authority over men that all persons are bound by natural law to preserve both themselves and others and forbidden to harm themselves and others. Why? Because human beings are all God's property and, in that sense, they are equal. That is why he says they are not made for another's uses. Any arbitrary power to take the lives or property of another cannot be transferred to any person or legislative body. The sacredness of individual persons follows for Locke from their being special beings made by God in His image. Respect for the dignity of equal and independent moral agents motivates an individualist stance.[43]

Another important point about the obligation to God is what Simmons call 'the dilemma of voluntarism'. It was explained that for Locke what is morally right and wrong presuppose the existence of a law (the divine law) and that law is the command of a rightfully superior will (God). However, one may ask whetheracts are right (or wrong) simply because they are commanded (or forbidden) by God? Or does God command humans to perform those acts because they are right? Locke's position on these questions is not clear, because his answer seems to be that individuals must obey God's commands not because of their character as wise but because they have antecedent obligation to obey because of God's right of creation, that is because he created us. The right of creation for Locke seems to be the end of the explanatory chain. He takes it for granted that we will see this (as he takes for granted a general acknowledgement of God's existence).

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[43] Simmons, ibid., p.58.

Modern readers of his ideas however, are questioning whether creation and obligation are intrinsically or necessarily connected. And this problematic relationship between creation and obligation is the third important point about Locke's claims about obedience to God. For Locke they are closely related, because according to him the process of creation on the part of God is something different from what is understood by the term "creation" in general. It is *sui generis*.

On the issue of voluntarism a comparison with Machiavelli and Hobbes might be illuminating. Hobbes describes a law of nature as a general rule found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do what is destructive of his life or takes away the means of preserving it. Moral wrongness consists precisely in the irrationality of noncompliance with the law. That is it is true not only that wrongdoing is irrational, but that conduct is wrong because it is irrational. On Hobbesian interpretation, natural law would be independent of God's will, but be derivable without reference to God at all. These points are opposite of Locke's voluntarism. The natural law cannot be the law of reason in the sense of binding us because it commands what is rational; it binds us because God commands it. However, Locke also believes that natural law is the law of reason, in what sense then? For him morality is not chiefly concerned with rational self interest, but rather with the interests of all persons: natural law commands what is in best interest of mankind as a whole, and it is in this sense rational for Man. These views are at odds with Machiavelli's approach too, because as was explained above, for Machiavelli right or wrong acts are to be measured solely with reference to their functionality in rendering the state powerful and fuelling the sense of public duty.

There are two important criticisms of Locke's views on the obedience to God and therefore of his moral theory in general since that notion lies at the heart of morality for him. First, as Simmons points out especially with his thoughts about creation/obligation he comes dangerously close to simply asserting God's authority without any further substantial comment. His framework is theocentric: we must obey God because He is God.[44]

The second criticism is regarding his strong claim that there can be no doubt concerning the existence of God. Jenkins argues that Locke is not saying simply that we can be reasonably persuaded of God's existence: he is claiming that we can be certain that there is a God and that the evidence for God's existence is equal to mathematical certainty.[45] This is a very strong language, and he must have realized that anyone who was concerned about God's existence would wish to test his reasons for this.

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[44] Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights*, p.
[45] J. Jenkins, *Understanding Locke An Introduction to Philosophy Through John Locke's Essay* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), p.231.

Concluding Remarks

The comparative analysis of the views of three canonical figures of classical political thought on morality demonstrates that while there are several similarities between Machiavelli and Hobbes, Locke's perspective is almost completely different from both of them. The most essential parallelism between Machiavelli and Hobbes is the attempt at building a conception of morality without reference to God and religious principles. Second, their views regarding morality are in the form of an interest in what is morally right and morally wrong not in the private lives of individuals but in the public-political life. Hence, both cast a dominant position to the state in determining what is morally right and morally wrong; and this is another important point of convergence between them. Yet, there is an important difference between the ways they formulate the role of the state: Hobbes conceptualizes the state as the sole mechanism of providing the individuals with security and legitimizes political obligation on this ground; while for Machiavelli obedience to the sovereign power is an end in itself. This difference seems to stem from their different conceptions of human nature: Machiavelli argues that "men are bad and ready to display their vicious nature whenever they may find occasion for it" while Hobbes talks about a tension between two important forces of human nature: love of power and fear of violent death. These can also be reconciled through obedience to the decisions of the sovereign regarding what is what is right and morally wrong. For Machiavelli, on the other hand the authority of the sovereign in determining what is morally right and wrong is the sine qua non of a strong political community.

As mentioned above, the most distinguishing aspect of Locke is this: the general framework surrounding his views on morality is the idea of God. The criteria according to which what is morally right and morally wrong are defined is neither rationality (Hobbes) nor functionality in rendering the state more powerful (Machiavelli). The sole reference point is the will of the God. What lies behind this claim is his claim that morality is related with what is good for humanity. In this respect, Locke argues that since it is God who created humans, God's laws epitomize what is good for the humanity. This is the reason why Locke states that when there is a tension between "divine law" on the one hand, and "civil law" and "law of opinion" on the other hand, it can only be overcome by taking the former as the criterion.

It may be stated as an outcome of this comparative analysis that these three important figures do not have much in common in terms of their conception of morality, that is, in terms of the ways they chose to deal with this question and in terms of their particular propositions as to what is or is not to be accepted as moral. However, one thing is common: the issue of morality is at the very center of their theoretical frameworks interconnected with their arguments regarding other crucial concepts of their analyses, like for instance, human nature, state, individual/community relationship, authority, and power.

It is a pervasive attitude, for some time, to identify the interest in socio-political life with strive to understand and explain what is happening and why it is happening. Surely, this kind of alertness is anything but trivial. Nevertheless, this study is a humble attempt at remembering and reminding the long-lasting popularity of morality as well as the legitimacy of the question "what ought to be?" within political analysis. An overview of the different ways in which the canonical figures of the classical political thought dealt with this crucial question is thought in this study as an aspect of such remembering.

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