

THE 'EMPTY ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPTION' IN THE WORK OF MACHIAVELLI*

A 'CONCEPÇÃO ANTROPOLÓGICA VAZIA' NA OBRA DE MACHIAVELLI

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ABSTRACT

The theme of anthropology, in Machiavellian work, is the source of various discussions and contradictions. In this article, we will dedicate ourselves the task of arguing that there is, in Machiavellian thought, an “empty anthropological conception”, which is not constituted as “systematic anthropology”, but acts as a guideline for a realistic political discussion in view of government needs. Our first step is to briefly point out a classical and medieval tradition, this last Christian, which establish a fixed and universal anthropological paradigm. Then we will turn to Machiavellian thought, seeking to demonstrate that: I – there is no fixed anthropological content; II – there is a distinction in the discussion about an alleged human nature and a political sphere; III – there is a “politicization” of the concepts of “evil” and “good”, surpassing the theological “evil”; Finally, IV – there is an original political formulation of feelings of passion, desire and ambition. The originality of Machiavellian thought is exactly in the promulgation of an “empty anthropological conception” without fixed content, which can be used as an application to political discussion in view of the needs imposed on the political body and forms of government.

KEYWORDS: Machiavelli; anthropology; republicanism; policy.

RESUMO

O tema da antropologia, no pensamento maquiaveliano, é fonte de várias discussões e contradições. Neste artigo, nos deteremos na tarefa de argumentar que há, no pensamento maquiaveliano, uma “concepção antropológica vazia”, a qual não se constitui como uma “antropologia sistemática”, mas atua como diretriz para uma discussão política realista em vista das necessidades de governo. Nosso primeiro passo será apontar, brevemente, uma tradição clássica e medieval, esta última cristã, as quais estabelecem um paradigma antropológico fixo e universal. Em seguida, nos voltaremos para o pensamento maquiaveliano, buscando demonstrar que: I – não há um conteúdo antropológico fixo; II – há uma distinção na discussão sobre uma pretensa natureza humana e uma esfera política; III – há uma “politização” dos conceitos de “mal” e “bem”, superando o “mal” teológico; por fim, IV – há uma original formulação política dos sentimentos de paixão, desejo e ambição. A originalidade do pensamento maquiaveliano está exatamente na promulgação de uma “concepção antropológica vazia”, sem conteúdo fixo, que pode ser usada como aplicação para a discussão política em vista das necessidades impostas ao corpo político e as formas de governo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Machiavelli; antropologia; republicanismo; política.

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of anthropology in the philosophical discussion is quite broad and can be tracked from the classic period, if we take the propositions about human nature, their faculties, rational, ethical, desiderative and even spiritual constitutions. Thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle, pagans, or the Christians Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, built true theoretical buildings from this theme of human nature and all its constitutions and particularities. However, in the field of politics this discussion becomes more pronounced in modernity, from the so called “Jus naturalism”, the proposition of a “human nature”, or rather “state of nature”, will be the basis for thinking about political reality of State. Not that Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, among others, did not related their political theories to a fixed human nature, on the contrary, they did so quite complex. What we highlight is the fact that in modernity anthropology has taken a central accent in building a new perspective on political organization.

At the beginning of modernity an author seems to subvert this philosophical-political tradition that privileges the pursuit of a “human nature” to establish the foundations of a theory about political organizations. Niccolò Machiavelli, who according to Lefort (2008) has around his name not only a curiosity, but rather a kind of myth, presents such a broad and intricate political thought that it becomes, at various times, diffuse and even apparently disconnected. The form of writing of the Florentine, without much systematization, leaves several gaps around its concepts, propositions and theories on the issue of politics, human nature and various other themes.

In this brief article we will deal with the controversial thematic of anthropology in the Machiavellian work, or rather a possible “empty anthropological conception of human nature”. Our effort is aimed at demonstrating that the Machiavellian anthropological conception is an “empty anthropology”, it does not have a fixed, positive or negative content, before, it has an inductive applicability in understanding the material reality of the human being, in view of its construction of living civil as “forms” of government. It cannot be neglected the fact that there are already numerous approaches to the theme in the work of the Florentine, however, we understand that all are insufficient to consistently understand the whole political work of the author.

Due to impossibility of presenting all approaches in this short space, we only indicate three perspectives that generally express the most common approaches to the issue. First, there is the proposition of a “negative anthropology” in the work of Machiavelli, this is the case of

Bignotto (2008, p. 97), who tells us the following: “In studying the thought of Machiavelli and the place that occupies their considerations of an anthropological nature, we come to the conclusion that we do not find a true anthropology, but the use of a negative anthropological constant [...]”. We agreed with the statement of “not finding a true anthropology”, but we disagree with this “negative” perspective because it understands that the proposition of “negative anthropology” invariably would imply the existence of “positive anthropology”, and do not agree with a “constancy” in the use of such anthropology by the Florentine.

The second perspective is that of a “fundamental anthropological pessimism” in Machiavelli, such a view is proposed by Ames (2002, p. 96), as follows:

The meaning for Machiavelli, we insist, is not the description of human nature as corrupt, in the anthropological sense. Rather, the fact that it comes from a fundamentally pessimistic presupposition about human nature has a practical purpose: from the hypothesis of human evil, it can increasingly consider the most difficult situation of political action.

Again, we agree with the statement that there is no description of human nature as corrupt in the writings of Machiavelli, but we disagree with the statement of “a fundamentally pessimistic presupposition”, which would imply a fixed perspective on the part of the Florentine and the recognition of pessimism “structured”. In this same direction of an “anthropological pessimism” in Machiavelli, we have the perspective assumed by Haslam (2006, p. 52), which states that: “Machiavelli's comments about the nature of man are sparse but are in perfect consonance with an Augustinian pessimism”. This is the perspective that seems to us most wrong, so we totally disagree with her.

Indicated these three main perspectives on the issue of human nature in Machiavelli, we indicate the itinerary we will use to demonstrate our perspective, namely the establishment of an “empty anthropological conception”, without fixed content, without a structured constancy in the thought of the Florentine, without a negative or positive character, being only a variable of constitution of a political calculation that is only directed by the reality of political dispute. First, we will present the tradition that precedes Machiavellian thought and establishes itself as hegemonic from the classic period to the medieval, namely the proposition of a fixed human nature, determining the social and political relations, which defines and sustains a notion of “human being”.

Following this, we will present the elements of an “empty anthropological conception” in Niccolò Machiavelli, for this I – we will present the lack of “fixed anthropological content”,

II – the differentiation between the discussion about human nature in a “natural realm” and a “political scope”, III – a politicization of the concept of 'evil', finally, IV – we will present the use of the concepts of desire, ambition and passions in a purely political context. For the first movement we will dedicate a topic, as well as a topic for the second movement, involving all four aspects pointed out as constituents of an “empty anthropological conception” in Machiavellian thought. The first topic will be a bit more succinct, the second topic being slightly longer, since our intention is to present the assumptions assumed about Machiavellian theory.

1 ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION IN CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL TRADITION

At first, we can admit that the Greek and Christian traditions, mainly, directed the human being to a position of privilege and “exteriority” in relation to nature, postulating a construction both anthropological and political that first canceled the traits of human dependence in view of any determinism imposed by nature. Such a condition presupposes the constitution of a different nature of the human being, an anthropological and political construction that could from formal to material, from the ideal for the real. Such traditions are based on the need to create an ideal model for the human being, which serves as a parameter to be achieved in view of spiritual or moral evolution, an autonomy in relation to the kingdom of nature.

In an example of the Greek tradition, expressed by Plato (1955) in his *Protagoras* dialogue, the human being has a natural “political faculty” given by the gods. Plato in this text uses one of the many versions of the creation of humans, the myth of man's creation through the figures of Prometheus and Epimetheus. The human being is raised along with animals, not distinguishing at all. But because it is naturally unprotected, without hurry, claws or hooves, man receives from Prometheus the ability to dominate fire, which he steals from the Hephaestus, the God of fire. Seeing the gods that man came to have this ability, they thought it is necessary to also be given political capacity. Plato makes this defense to maintain that all individuals have the ability to participate in political life.

Differently from the Christian tradition, there is no natural essence that justifies a differentiation between animals and human beings at the time of creation, but there is a later divine “capacitation”, a faculty, granted in view of enabling political life. This principle will translate into a “political nature”, expressed both by Plato and Aristotle. According to Pinzani

(2006, p. 54), Machiavelli will not recognize this Greek tradition, neither Platonic nor Aristotelian, as follows:

The traditional Aristotelian definition of man as *Zóon Politikón* (which in Latin has been translated as a social animal, with a change of important meaning in relation to the original meaning of 'animal living in the *polis*'), is rejected by Machiavelli, to which society, instead, it is born of the constriction operated by the *Necessità*...

When we return to Christian tradition, from the “myth of creation”, we see that the human being, man and woman, are created distinctly from other animals, they are put as different, dominating over other animals that do not share nature Divine. The perfect existence of the human being is interrupted only when he disobeys God's command, being expelled and must face the difficulties of the struggle for survival and the imperfect existence of his own life in society. This version of the creation of the human being will be passed on to all existing monotheistic religions today, be it Judaism, Christianity or Islam.

It can be understood that the constitution of these parameters represents a support, a basis of justification for the defense of a certain mode of moral, political and social construction from an alleged human nature. For the Greek tradition, the human being has a capacity that allows him to take a political and ethical life based on the pursuit of improvement using his rational faculties. There are ideal parameters that direct this improvement, especially in view of an ethics of virtues and a policy built as an expression of “*logos*”. Even though there is no religious notion of a different human nature in its origin, there is a political proposition that points in its natural essence a differential that allows it a distance from other animals and the world itself through society.

In turn, in the Christian tradition the defense of a distinct human nature, a clearly separated origin from the origin of other animals, puts the human being in a prominent position and paves the way for the defense of a freedom that is only possible to him. In both models, in building an idea of an essential faculty that justifies an ethical evolution, rational, in view of political construction, as in the postulation of an original nature, linked to its own identity and divine essence, there is a parameter that justifies thinking about human from an essentially established origin, a fixed anthropological content. But, as indicated, such constructions are bases for sustaining cultural, religious and political traditions. More than that, they are pillars of complex systems of justification of the customs, norms, laws and ethical conduct to be followed by individuals in view of an evolutionary process, either through the pursuit of rational perfection or through spiritual sanctification.

The medieval Christian tradition will establish its anthropological content as primordial support for its moral and religious system, however, this content can and should direct the lives of individuals and reflect on the constitution of political reality, even if this reflection is erased by corruption of political life. The person responsible for the systematization of this tradition is undoubtedly Augustine, which establishes not only an anthropological system of theological bases, but mainly, puts it as a sustaining of a historical-theological view of politics.

The founding of Augustinian theory, which influences the entire medieval construction and conditions the understanding of the place of the human being in the natural world, establishes that human nature suffers a fracture, a break, by distancing itself from the presence of God. According to the bishop of Hipona this is the beginning of the “settlement of the earthly city”. Augustine maintains that the human being cannot save himself, or even find any purpose, within the political order or the natural order of things, but its nature has the ability to receive divine grace, which is the only way to redeem itself from its decayed condition. As well instructed Boyer (1970, p. 225):

Our nature, according to Hipona's doctor, is undoubtedly able to receive the vision of divine essence, but it cannot receive it if it seeks it for its own strength. From the original sin, we save ourselves only by grace. Grace, which saves the sinner, belongs to the order of the causes that God has not inserted into nature, and which he has reserved for the secret of his power.

The dominant ethical-political construction in the medieval is sustained in the Augustinian tradition of an anthropological understanding, conditioning the way the performance of the human being will be understood within the political arrangement. In this tradition there is no distinction between an essential nature, which defines human “*telos*” in view of the pursuit of salvation and regeneration of its decayed condition, and a political nature, established by the needs inherent in the struggle for survival and the organization of a political body. However, there is a political dependence on the definition of a fixed human nature, determined by defined theological foundations. Augustine is straightforward in determining that there is a human nature, a spiritual essence, which must overcome the imposition of corrupt political life, in his words: “When the 'two cities' undertook their evolutionary course, for births and successive deaths, the citizen of this world was born first and then the time pilgrim, who belongs to the City of God” (Agostinho, *De Civitate Dei*. XV, 2). We can say that 'celestial citizenship' suppresses 'earthly citizenship'.

The anthropological question of the restoration of a “spiritual nature” to the converted man, which can be said that dates to the Pauline construction of “two natures”, an old and one new, is very marked in Augustinianism. Contrary to stoicism, which did not propose a new human nature, Christianity will have this movement. In Augustine the theme of freedom of will is intrinsically linked to a deep internal struggle between the two human natures, one decayed and one that must take its place, a redeemed nature. Let's look at the Bishop's words:

The enemy dominated my will and forged me a chain with which I was squeezed. Now lust comes from the wicked will; while lust is used to contract the habit; and if one does not resist a habit, a necessity originates. This is how, for a kind of intertwined rings – so I called them jail – I was holding tight in hard slavery. The new will, which began to exist in me, the will to honor you for free and to want to enjoy you, O my God, the only safe contentment, was not yet able to overcome the other will, fortified by lust. Thus, two wills, one concupiscent, another dominated, one carnal and one spiritual, struggled mutually in me (Agostino, *Confessioni*. VIII 5, 10).

Thus, the anthropological question posed in Augustine, which will become the dominant foundation of the Christian-medieval tradition, maintains that there is a spiritual nature that must be restored in human beings, as it is dominated by a strong consequence of the fall of original sin. This anthropological construction supports a decayed view of the reality of politics, which is the maximum expression of evil that reigns in human beings after distancing himself from God. Accordingly, the anthropology present in the Christian-Medieval tradition has a fixed content, which points to a necessary regeneration, and this regeneration is not achieved by political living. As in Greek tradition, human beings are seen from a “fixed lens”, structured in a defined anthropological construction that does not allow to think of politics separately from it.

With the appropriate differences between the two traditions, what we maintain is that both have a fixed anthropological construction, which establishes a human nature that defines political traits, to establish them, as in the Greek case, or to present them as corrupt decayed, as in the case of Christian tradition. We will then seek to demonstrate that such a fixed construction of a human being is not found in Machiavellian thought, on the contrary, the Florentine establishes an anthropological conception that proves to be “empty”, “malleable”, adjusted only to the variations of a discussion of the forms of government. Therefore, we will follow our proposed itinerary from the beginning and will return to explain the elements that constitute an “empty anthropological conception” in Machiavelli.

2 THE ELEMENTS OF AN “EMPTY ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPTION” IN MACHIAVELLI

In this topic we will present what is constituted as an “empty anthropological conception” in Niccolò Machiavelli, presupposed that there is no fixed anthropological content, which would determine a (spiritual or ethical) “*telos*” or even a political purpose for the human being. To perform this demonstration, as already proposed in our introduction, we will develop in a single movement the central elements of this peculiar aspect of Machiavellian thought, namely, I – the lack of fixed content; II – a differentiation between the discussion about human nature in a “natural scope” and a “political scope”, III – a politicization of the concept of “evil” and “good”, finally, IV – we will present the use of the concepts of desire, ambition and passions in a purely political context.

Machiavelli establishes a basis of understanding of the social constitution that does not start from formal assumptions established as essential in view of human nature, which would justify a certain form of political organization. In this sense, it is not the form of government that must adapt to the constitutive principles of human nature, thus seeking a more “excellent” form of government. On the contrary, the form of government must be adequate to the needs faced by individuals in view of the materiality of their actions, given the challenges imposed by nature and political living. A “conception of human nature” must adapt to the political calculation of the form of government that best responds to these needs, those imposed by nature and those imposed by the challenge of political living. The defense of a fixed conception of human nature that justifies a form of government disconnected from needs is a failed construction, which starts from the formal, the idealized, for the material, for the concrete. This is exactly the movement used by traditions denied by Machiavelli, both classic and Christian-Medieval.

However, it is not a simple negative anthropology proposed by Machiavelli, it is not actually an “anthropology” in the strict sense of the term, as mentioned several times, there is no such construction in Machiavellian thought. It is an “empty anthropological conception” that is fulfilled with the conceptual terms necessary to discuss a certain form of government that responds to the needs imposed on individuals in building a political body. In other words, Machiavelli establishes an “anthropological conception” that will serve to establish the understanding of a certain political need, in a given context and with specific social and political

agents. In this way, the anthropological conception itself will adapt to what political reality imposes as a challenge of understanding.

In this way, it is possible to start understanding why Machiavelli seems to trace a more pessimistic conception of human nature in the *Principe* and a less pessimistic human nature in the *Discorsi*. In the first political context the form of government aims to restore a corrupted political body, in which individuals are unaccustomed to exercise civic virtues and actions that benefit the homeland. In the second context, the organization of the political body must reinforce public institutions, strengthen the civic spirit and enable, even to encourage, individual actions beneficial to the political balance of the homeland. In this first differentiation of political contexts, in which the Florentine seems to establish only an anthropological conception in view of political challenges, it is possible to realize that it does not promulgate a “fixed”, “essential” human nature. In the context of the principality, the Florentine states the following:

The princes do not regret some sins that commit the peoples they have under government, because such sins should be born or for their neglect, or because it is stained with similar errors. And whoever goes through the history of peoples, who in our times are fully taken from theft and similar sins, will see that they are all born to those who ruled them, who were of similar nature (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*. III, 29).

In this context, the vices (sins) of the peoples reflect the similar “nature” that have the princes who govern them. It is possible to argue the use of the term “sins” in a purely political sense, as we will discuss later, but it is also possible to perceive the use of the term “nature”, which the author uses to designate the provisions of good or bad actions in a sense political. Thereby, it is possible to understand that the very “nature” of the subjects is somewhat shaped by the kind of government that the prince constitutes, the people is a “reflex” of his sovereign. In the government of a prince, the content of anthropological assumptions must be directed to guide an honest, virtuous nature, focused on good social life and commitment to the ruler and the political body. The prince is a “restorative” of the political body, even Machiavelli presented a pessimistic perspective of individuals, he argues that the political leader has the “prerogative” of shaping such individuals. Let's look at what the Florentine says of individuals in that work:

About men can generally say this: they are ungrateful, volatile, simulators, liars, escape danger, always looking for gains; while good, they are all yours, they offer you blood, wealth, life, and children, as it said above, when the need is distant, but when it approaches, they revolt (Machiavelli, *Principe*, XVII).

We have here an application of the inductive character of the Machiavellian anthropological conception, the context is political, Machiavelli is tracing a “model” of human being from the political relationship of the subjects and the monarch. However, as seen above, the prince can make “reflect” his own nature in his subjects. By putting in context the two quotations, we can see that for Machiavelli the political leader must keep in mind that, within the political context, there is a “predisposition” of individuals for failure, lies and simulation, however, there is also the possibility to “shape” this nature according to the good laws, new orders and modes, which will be introduced by the prince.

On the other hand, in the republican government the nature of the individual must be taken as constant, without variations in view of the alternations of *Fortuna*. Individuals should reflect this firm “nature”, solidified in the love of the homeland and the impetuosity in facing the most difficult times the Republic can pass. These excellent men are references to individuals who are in a republic and need to stay firm regardless of the setbacks it faced. Take the text of the Florentine again:

Among other magnificent things that our historian says about Camilo's actions and speeches, to show how an excellent man should be done, he puts these words in his mouth: *Nec nihi dictatura animos fecit, nec exilium ademit*. By which one sees, as great men are always in each fortune themselves; And if it varies, sometimes to exalt them sometimes to oppress them, they do not vary, but always has a firm mood and in such a way with their way of living that easily known by anyone that fortune has no power about them (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*. III. 31).

In a republican context it is good for individuals to always have the same “nature”, not varying according to the *Fortuna* or agreement of the whims of those in government. On the contrary, they must maintain a firm nature, anchored in a *Virtù* that allows them to overcome adversity. First, Machiavelli deconstructs an idea that each individual is responsible for his “evil”, his sins, at least in a political sense, thought of good or bad actions in the social realm. The Florentine establishes a form of political representation of human nature that conditions good deeds according to the imitation of the good examples of a government leader. In this scenario, the freedom defended by Augustine in view of free will and the autonomy of will seem to make no difference.

Still in an idea of “nature”, in the republican case, while a disposition that must be constant, Machiavelli opposes the Augustinian understanding of freedom of will by assuming that excellent men do not change their convictions and actions, regardless of what they come to face or even in view of a spiritual or moral evolution. This aspect is important to understand the

level of difference between Christian anthropological tradition, established by the theory of Augustinian will, and the apparently “empty” proposal of the Machiavellian anthropological conception, which varies according to the political context to be discussed. According to Mansfield (1998, p. 55):

For Machiavelli there is only one beginning – need. All human institutions begin without a inheritance of God or nature. God has not given us a perfect beginning, as the Bible says, and nature does not provide us with potentiality for politics, as Aristotle says.

What Machiavelli does is establish an anthropological conception that helps respond to certain problems put by political reality and its challenges, the *necessità*, which boosts the human being to a form of transient government. There is no theoretical space for a fixed anthropology, with content that determines the human being essentially in all political situations.

The conception of a “empty anthropology” in Machiavelli, not only negative in the sense of anthropological pessimism, allows the discussion about the human individual in their two dimensions, namely natural and politics. Regarding the first, the Florentine does not make consistent considerations, without the definition of an essence. In most cases, he analyzes the nature of individuals in particular, being more impetuous or more cautious, constant in their actions or wavering, always seeming to oppose one condition to another. However, when Machiavelli does these analyzes of the nature of these individuals is always in a political context, and when it seems to present a general conception of the nature of man, he also does so in political direction, always having as a background an established political condition in view of the planning or regeneration of a political body.

These factors allow us to understand that for Machiavelli the only possible scope to discuss any kind of conception about human nature is the politician, not being a discussion that defines the human being in essential, fixed terms. Machiavelli, by establishing a malleable anthropological conception, which applies inductively in the analysis of political bodies, subverts the dominant system in the medieval and makes it possible to think the human being in a natural dimension and a political dimension. As already indicated, this first natural dimension is not satisfactorily defined in his work and can be glimpsed more clearly in the way he establishes the origin of society. The machiavellian notion of a human origin is not linked to the Greek tradition, much less to the Judeo-Christian tradition of a perfect origin. According to Vincieri (1984), Machiavelli is more in line with the Lucretian image of the origin of men, who live scattered as beasts and join only when the number of their generations increases.

Machiavelli's choice for a distant view of myths and religion, about the origin of the human being, indicates his intention to support the thesis that all institutions, values and principles are constructions of the political arrangement. In this sense, both States and religions are constructions after the movement of political ordering, and there is no essential, unchanging human nature that justifies the predominance of religion over the State. Take the author's writing about the origin of human society:

The variations of governments among men are born from the fact that at the beginning of the world, being the few inhabitants, they were scattered like animals; then, by multiplying their generation, they put themselves together and to better defend themselves began to seek among themselves the strongest and greatest heart and courage, making them bosses and obeying them (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*. I, 2).

For Vincieri, in the narrative assumed by Machiavelli, it is the search for security that leads individuals to gather themselves, no longer dispersed, thus forming the first social forms, later political. In addition to Vincieri, Pietro Conte (19 [...], p. 138) also maintains this understanding that Machiavelli expresses the human being in his natural state, in which only instincts present themselves, indicating that they join society only for fear and in search of security, so they choose the strongest individual as a leader at first.

The human being is not a social being by nature, if so, he would start in the world in a social state, much less has a faculty that makes it essentially social. There is also no indication of a differentiated origin of the human being, given by a deity, which was misrepresented at the beginning. What is in the Machiavelian account is only the beginning of the social internship, driven by the increase in the generation of individuals, the increase in the number of individuals who gathered themselves, seeking subsequent security within this first social arrangement. In this way, the human being, as a natural being, has no quality, faculty or divine essence that differentiates him from other animals, being therefore indifferent to Machiavelli to discuss more closely on this point.

But, as indicated, the “political being” must be understood as defining the way forms of government are established. All qualities, vices, virtues, laws and institutions will be thought from the human being as a creator of the “political sphere”, inserted in a social gathering that enables this organization. This “non essential” feature of human nature expressed by the Florentine is that enables the construction of “empty anthropological conception”, without fixed content that defines an unchanging and deterministic essence. The prince can become the leader of a corrupted political body, with unfair, simulators and greedy individuals and “shape” their

“natures” according to his own. Just as an individual can have an incorruptible, constant “nature”, he mold according to civic principles and love to his homeland. It is then up to us to ask: Where is evil in human nature to Machiavelli?

The central premise in the Augustinian thesis present in the Western medieval is that God established the human being with freedom, expressed by free will, which must be used by him to gain his return to divine presence, being attracted to “Grace”. Understanding theologically, “evil” cannot be attributed to God's creative action, thus being linked to the essential freedom present in human nature, being solely the fault of his misrepresented choice and his departure from the original condition of innocence. That said, the notion that the regeneration of such a decayed condition is clear, as well as the very existence of evil, cannot be remedied at the level of the materiality of social or political life.

Augustinian pessimism is centered on the premise that human beings, acting simply by their moral strength, or even by ethical and civic virtues, if not linked to divine will, will never be able to return to the presence of God, which would allow to nullify the action of the sin originated at the time of the fall. As Rahe argues, both the concepts of original sin and divine grace, from Augustinian theory, are perceived in the Florentine conception of Republican politics, but, rejected by Machiavelli:

The only difference that separates Machiavelli from the bishop of Hippona and the guilds from the medieval communes is that there is no space, in the conception of the Florentine of Republican politics, for original sin and divine grace. Certainly, this defect is decisively different because it releases its policy from all moral limits and ecclesiastical protection (Rahe, 2000, p. 302).

From this enlightening placement of Rahe we can list three basic consequences to understand the politicization of the concept of evil by Machiavelli. First, the question of the preexistence of evil before the emergence of social organization (*Vivere Civile*), in the event of such preexistence, political reality would be its simple harmful consequence. Second, as the notion of evil can be used to understand political actions within the various forms of government, especially in view of concord, or not, between individuals and an alleged pursuit of ethical perfection. Third, understanding how a notion of evil, established in formal, mythical, religious or ethical principles, is not in conforming, and even harmful, to political ordination in view of the needs imposed by the materiality of actions of individuals in society.

According to Strauss (1978), there is no in the Machiavellian texts the confrontation of antagonisms, such as heaven and hell, God and the Devil, much less the mirroring of such

dichotomy in understanding the existence of a “good” and an “evil”. Sometimes he uses the terms God, heaven and religion, they are always in very different senses of the Christian religion, being closer to pagan religions and astrology, and always linked to the developments of actions in the political sphere. If the Florentine had established a struggle between “good” and “evil”, since before the existence of the human being and his political reality, making all the human history submissive to this struggle, he would completely cancel any political construction that is established in view of the answers to the concrete needs imposed by nature and civil living. It is possible to realize why the Florentine presents his account from the origin of societies completely excluding the existence of an original 'evil'.

The use of the term “evil” by Machiavelli is always associating political life, social organization, founding or reorganization of a certain form of government. In the Machiavellian text the notion of “evil” arises along with the notions of perniciousness and injustice, being contrary to the notions of honesty, kindness and justice. All these notions are linked to the idea of retribution by actions performed in relation to other individuals in political and social life. Evilness, perniciousness and injustice are the conditions of actions that hinder the political-social life of individuals, generating fear, distrust and disorder, making any order of a healthy political body impossible. Such notions do not carry the weight of anthropological content based on formal principles or established from a preexisting dichotomy before social organization.

These primary notions for political organization (*Del Vivere Civile*) are designed in view of the relations of individuals in an incipient political environment, established by needs that join the needs experienced in natural life outside such context. Therefore, the very constructions arising from this new scenario, political living, are conditioned by it. The notions of honesty, perniciousness, kindness, evilness, justice and injustice, always linked to the actions of individuals, are later constructions in the establishment of the political organization. Let's look at Machiavellian text again:

From this arises the knowledge of honest and good things, different from pernicious and evil things: because, seeing that if a person harmed his benefactor, there came among others hatred for the evildoer and compassion for the benefactor, cursing the ungrateful and honoring those who were grateful, and still thinking that the same harm could be done to them, to escape such evils, they began to make laws, ordering punishments for anyone who opposed them, where knowledge of just things comes from (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, 2).

It is not plausible, within the Machiavellian construction, to think of a notion of “evil” that can be placed as prior to the very existence of political reality. The notion of “evil”, politically established by Machiavelli, is also used by him in the evaluation and analysis of the participation of individuals in the ordering and search for balance in the body politic, especially in a republic. In these cases, actions that can be defined as good or bad must be analyzed considering the historical moment, as well as material needs. Otherwise, if the point of analysis for such an assessment is some fixed definition of “good” or “evil”, the deception may not be perceived and that which has the appearance, or shadow, of “good” is, in fact, an “evil”.

One of the most iconic cases treated by Machiavelli on this theme is that of Spúrio Melio. In chapter 28 of Book III of the *Discorsi* (1954), he deals with the situation in which Spúrio Melio, through his action to alleviate the hunger of the people of Rome at a time of terrible lack of food, gained the favor of the people in such a way that he put them on alert the Senate. The Senate's response was to appoint a dictator and have Spúrio Melio executed. From this situation, Machiavelli concludes that it is beneficial for there to be men of good reputation in the republic, but that such reputations are achieved through public improvements, not private ones, and that they serve for the benefit and freedom of the republic. The maxim extracted by Machiavelli from this lesson is the following: “It is remarkable how often works that seem pious and impossible to be reasonably condemned, become cruel, being dangerous for a republic, when not corrected in good time” (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, 28).

If a private individual gained the full support of the people, he could have the impetus to carry out a coup, or else take broad political advantage from the situation. Such a context would lead to disorganization of the political body and put the stability of the republic at risk. Thus, political “evil” would present itself masked as a “good” that no one could disapprove. Understood from the materiality of the needs imposed by political reality, “evil” for Machiavelli is conditioned by situations that are established only within the political arrangement, not conceiving an “evil” prior to this arrangement and much less defining the essential nature of being human. Overcoming the notion of theological “evil” lies precisely in perceiving these differentiations, both due to the non-existence of an “evil” prior to political reality, and through the application of such a notion only in political calculation.

The political relationship regarding desires, ambitions and passions also directs the Machiavellian discussion towards the materiality of relationships between individuals and human nature. In other words, when addressing these feelings, Florentine will present an inductive interpretation that leads to a direct application in political discussion, without

metaphysical, theological or essential assumptions or principles. Perhaps it is an unsafe move to classify ambition, desire and passions as “feelings”, whether from the Christian tradition, originating from the Augustinian construction, or from the Machiavellian formulation in view of the political dimension.

In the Christian tradition, desires, ambitions and passions are specific expressions of the fallen and decrepit situation of the human essence, more than that, they are “vehicles” of the pure expression of the evil of human beings in their actions distanced from the divine will. The condition of slavery of the human being in relation to his passions, consequently to his desires, is the clearest finding of the need to seek internalized freedom in the autonomy of will and in his adherence to will and divine aid. Augustine, in *De Civitate Dei* (1941), establishes that philosophers, both Greek and Roman, discuss the issue of passions, sometimes arguing that such passions affect the soul of the wise man, sometimes not. But following Cicero's lead, he states that such philosophers debate, but only construct word games, as follows:

Two opinions separate philosophers regarding the movements of the soul which the Greeks call *páthe*, the Romans, some at least, like Cicero, disturbances, others, affections, or more in accordance with the Greek expression, passions. Such disturbances, affections or passions are not exempt, according to some philosophers, from affecting the soul of the wise, who tames them and submits them to reason, because he recognizes the sovereignty of the spirit, which imposes fair limits on them. This is the thought of the defenders of Plato and Aristotle, disciple of Plato and founder of the peripatetic school. Other philosophers, such as the Stoics, prohibit passions from having any access in the soul of the wise man. But, in the treatise *On the Ends of Goods and Evils*, Cicero proves that between the philosophers of the Portico and the followers of Plato and Aristotle the difference is more of words than of realities (Augustin, *De Civitate Dei*. IX, 4).

Starting from these statements, in which he uses the authority figure of Cicero to support his rhetoric, he indicates that the Christian is not immune to passions, especially because he still has his fallen nature, however, he submits his passions and his own will to the aid of the divine will, as follows:

There is no need to present in profusion and care what the divine Scriptures, the source of the Christian religion, teach about the passions. They submit the spirit to God, so that he may help and direct it, and the passions to the spirit, so that it may moderate and restrain them, so that they may be converted to the uses of justice. (Augustin, *De Civitate Dei*, IX, 5).

In a rhetorical movement, the bishop of Hipona seeks to overcome both the Greek tradition of philosophers and the interpretation undertaken by Cicero and his influence on the Roman tradition. Furthermore, it establishes the Christian paradigm that would be predominant

in the Middle Ages in relation to the domain of passions and desires, as well as the only way to correct the “spiritual flaw” that characterizes the human being in its essence. Regarding the Machiavellian formulation, we argue that the understanding of such expressions of human feelings, desire, passions and ambition, takes a distinct direction from that consolidated by Christian tradition, especially Augustinian. The first reason is the already defended difference between Augustinian anthropology, dominant in the Middle Ages, with a fixed and formal content, and the “empty anthropological conception” established by the Florentine. In the first there is an essential definition of the human being, in the second, only an inductive conception that must be used in view of political calculation.

Machiavelli argues that all “men are bad”, in the same way, maintains that all men are always subject to the same passions, cultures, peoples and forms of government. He argues: “Certainly, always, what happens now in the world has similarities with what has already happened. This comes from the fact that, since all human things are handled by people who have and will always have the same passions, they always present the same results”. (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*. III, 43). We can conclude from this that, just as is the case with the first statement about the evil of men, passions are also taken as an inductive guideline for a political calculation that must be applied in the analysis, organization and reorganization of a political body. Machiavelli's statements may once again open a discussion about his adherence to a pessimistic view of human nature, something universal, close to Christian understanding.

However, we agreed with Ames (2002, p. 98) in affirming his position in relation to this aspect of Machiavellian theory, pointing to a political calculation, as follows: “His statements about desire have a practical purpose, much more of his own observations of political life and historical knowledge, particularly from Rome, than of an accurate reflection on human nature”. This understanding, we believe, can also be applied to the statements made by the Florentine about passions and ambition. He also does not adhere to a metaphysical or intellectualist perspective, present in the classical Greek tradition.

On the contrary, his approach will bring such feelings as essential to construct the political calculation of the ruler, legislator or reformer of a state, but, in addition, it will also be essential to discuss the issue of freedom, whether of the individual or of political groups, the *umori*. But a question arises: 'what conditions the constitution of passions and desires, since they are not universal or essentially determining human nature? Well, a plausible answer is in a well-known passage from Machiavellian work, let's see: “The truth is that his works, now in this province more virtuous than in that one and in the other more than in this one, according to

the form of education in which those people have taken their way of living”. (Machiavelli, *Discorsi*. III, 43).

Thus, even if “all men are moved by the same passions and desires”, education, political constitution and social organization can shape such feelings. From this perspective, there is no natural, immutable determinant that establishes a universal understanding of passions and desires, much less should they be 'directed' through the spiritual path. The results may be different depending on the type of education and political institutions. Even though they can be taken as “inductive constants” to think about political calculation, passions, desires and ambitions are not a fixed content in the definition of the human being and can be shaped according to the political organization.

In another stretch, Machiavelli again uses this premise of education that shapes the desires and passions, producing political results. This excerpt is in his work *Istorie Fiorentine* (1954), in chapter 13 of Book V, when discussing the disputes between the Florentines and the Duke of Milan, who came to the aid of the residents of Lucca, Machiavelli states that: “The Florentines were divided between two diverse passions: the desire to have Lucca and the fear of war with the duke. However, as always, fear won” (Machiavelli, 1954, p. 589). This stretch is very interesting as it can help us reinforce our understanding. In the excerpt in question, the Florentines are affected by two passions, desire (the desire for something), to win Lucca, and fear (terror of something), in facing the Duke of Milan. Machiavelli uses this fact to maintain that the Florentines never had an education focused on glory, conquest, they would never be a Rome.

Evaluating his statement, in view of his previous maxim that the works of individuals are more virtuous or not, in view of their passions, according to their education and way of living, we can have a perspective that is linked to our understanding that he deals with this issue from a pure political perspective. When reporting the case of the Florentines, he makes it clear, based on his own thesis, that they did not have the correct “education” that shaped their passions in view of virtuous works. Thus, the quality of “virtuous” would be understood as a political adjective, characterizing a political body that has the correct education to become strong, expansionist, and capable of perpetrating great deeds.

Once again, what we have is an “inductive guideline”, which serves to build a political calculation, it is not a fixed anthropological statement, determining and immutable human nature. Passions and desires are always similar, as political relationships between individuals are similar, however, the constitution of each political body, guided by correct education,

produces different results. With these considerations on passions, desires and ambitions, we ended our proposed itinerary since the beginning of our work.

CONCLUSION

As indicated at the beginning of our work, the discussion about a possible anthropology in Machiavelli is very wide and controversial, our intention was exactly contributing to such discussion. We present our perspective, an 'empty anthropological conception', without fixed content, without the definition of an essential evil or good, which evaluates the human being in the political sphere, as well as giving new contours to the theme of passions and desires. Machiavellian theory is directly opposed to classical tradition, as well as the Christian medieval tradition, especially that which arose from Augustinian thought.

In addition, Machiavellian theory is a construction that does not resemble any construction of humanist thought of the Renaissance. The unfolding of an “empty anthropological conception”, in terms of political discussion, is exactly the possibility of thinking of institutions from the challenges imposed by reality. A both natural and political reality, which imposes challenges that must be thought in a practical and concrete way, without metaphysical, theological or formal principles.

In general, Machiavellian theory analyzes political action from a practical, realistic perspective, without the imposition of shaping the forms of government in view of a alleged determining human nature. The movement made by Machiavelli will be original not only in relation to classical and medieval tradition, but also in relation to a political tradition that has been consolidated in modernity, *Jus naturalism*. Thus, the formulation of an “empty anthropological conception” becomes a hiatus, a unique perspective that gives Machiavellian thought another point of inflection in relation to the other political theories of modernity.

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