Machiavelli: Political Morality; Statecraft

History of Machiavelli:
Machiavelli was the first thinker who freed political science or theory from the clutches of religion and morality. He was not interested in high moral or religious principles. His main concern was power and the practical or political interests of the state. It would be the primary concern of the prince in particular and government in general to protect the interests of state.

In this connection R. N. Berki writes:
“He is also renowned for being exceptionally outspoken and candid in his views, writing with a clinical detachment or sometimes even cynicism about issues. Such as the use of violence and deception in politics”.
In other words Machiavelli was the first thinker who took an unequivocal stand in regard to the relationship between religion, morality and virtue on the one hand and politics on the other. He adopted a very clear stand about politics, religion and morality.

He never denounced virtue, morality and religion. But what he emphasized is that the domain of morality and religion is quite different from that of politics and the prince must maintain it in his treat mental of politics.

Machiavelli strongly advocated a dichotomy between morality and religion on the one hand and politics on the other. But Skinner is of opinion that. This dichotomy is not Machiavelli’s own creation or discovery.

Aristotle in his Politics adopted such form of dichotomy and Machiavelli scrupulously adopted Aristotelian method. Aristotle held the view that the “qualities which deserve admiration in a prince may be different from those which deserve admiration in a private citizen”.
Even many other thinkers following Aristotle and Machiavelli said that “the virtues of the rulers are one thing; the virtues of the people are another.” In this way Machiavelli established a separate set of virtues for the prince or the ruler.

In The Prince he emphasized that the prince must follow a virtue which is “creative”—creative in the sense that the virtue of the prince would be able to maintain the state. With the help of his virtues the prince would “fight off” his enemies.

We, therefore, find that Machiavelli used the word “virtue” not in any conventional sense. The supreme objective of a prince is always to maintain the unity of his state and to bring it under good administration. People of the state always demand that they are not to be oppressed and exploited.

It is the primary duty of the ruler to look after it and if any ruler fails to achieve it he is unfit for the post of ruler or to be called a prince. At the same time Machiavelli declared that if a prince or ruler fails to achieve this objective he cannot demand obligation from his subjects.

In this way Machiavelli had established a new norm for politics and that norm is politics has nothing to do with the conventional type of morality or ethics.

We further observe that Machiavelli denounced his contemporary political theories because they failed to emphasize the importance of power. In his opinion power is the most important aspect of political theory.

Even today we cannot deny this concept power politics or practical politics does not give full recognition to morality or religion. Last of all we hold the view that he built up a wall between politics and religion not guided by personal preference but by the prevailing situation of his time.

**Dunning, a noted interpreter of Western political thought, writes:**

“In no system of political philosophy is the influence of environment more manifest than in that of Machiavelli. The brilliant Florentine was in the fullest sense the child of his time.”
Political Ideas of Machiavelli:

1. Absolutism:
At the beginning of the 16th century we see a very important aspect of modern political theory which can simply be stated as modern absolutism. In the opinion of Sabine, Machiavelli is the father of this absolutism.

He suggested the separation between religion, morality and politics. In political matters the king will have the last word to say and all other centres must submit to political power.

In the words of Sabine:
“Absolute monarchy overturned feudal constitutionalism and the free city-states, on which medieval civilization had largely depended….Ecclesiastical rulers were everywhere subjected more and more to royal control and in the end church’s legal authority disappeared”.

Both Renaissance and Reformation drastically cut the wings of church and papacy which created vacuum in social and political fields and this was forthwith filled up by the emergence of absolute royal power.

Hence absolute royal power became the order of European politics. The growth of absolute monarchy, like that of feudal constitutional monarchy, took place in almost every part of western Europe.

The question is why the absolute monarchy came to be the order of the day of European politics. In the medieval period the church or the Ecclesiastical authority in all possible ways discouraged the people to ignore the financial issues which ultimately resulted in the complete stagnation of economy. Both Renaissance and Reformation enlightened people’s mind, thought and outlook and this, in turn inspired them to go out in search of money and wealth.

In the new situation and atmosphere the medieval institutions were remodelled and partially revolutionized to cope with the new situation. Before Renaissance and Reformation trade and commerce were local and they operated in certain fixed routes.
After these two, both trade and commerce became international or, we can say, the operation of trade and commerce expanded considerably. The wealth of many nations increased beyond imagination and simultaneously many people having considerable enterprise came to be the owners of newly created wealth.

That is wealth, power and enterprise were in the hands of few persons and they came to be called capitalist class or bourgeois class. Before Renaissance and Reformation, in European society there was class of nobility and after these two there arose a new class—the capitalist class and finally the old class of nobility was forced to submit to the class of capitalists.

The capitalist class saw that the citadel of wealth and property would face insecurity if military power and administration remained out of its control. In other words, the bourgeois class was very much eager to control the power and military of the state.

The power of the kings in all practical senses must be absolute but it must remain under the control and supervision of the capitalists. At the time of Machiavelli the capitalists were rising quite rapidly and they sought royal protection for the growth of trade and commerce. The meteoric rise of the power of kings appeared to be salubrious to the bourgeoisie.

This class thought that with the help of the royal power it would be able to secure its wealth, because the king was the authority of military and bureaucratic administration. Machiavelli fully understood the social, economic and political situation of Italy and at the same time he thought that only an absolute monarch or prince with enormous power could save Italy.

Democracy, liberalism, people’s rights etc. had very little importance to him. Only an absolute monarchy was the need of the day.

Machiavelli was a great patriot and nationalist. He was convinced that only a powerful king could unite divided Italy. A powerful prince could hasten the economic progress.
A united Italy was badly needed and a prince with enormous power at his disposal could achieve it. Like other Italians Machiavelli held the church responsible for the miserable condition of Italy.

So we hold the view that the prevailing situation forced Machiavelli to strongly argue for a strong monarchy. Machiavelli was a practical man and he had wide interests and curiosity in politics.

Italy of his time was weak politically and militarily. She was cornered in European politics. This ignoble position of Italy pained Machiavelli and he decided that Italy must be saved at any cost. Installation of an absolute power was the only solution.

Absolute power of the prince was the only way. In support of his conclusion Machiavelli drew examples from ancient history of various European states.

It means that at first he took a decision or selected a way and after that he gathered “facts in support of his decision. This some people call Machiavellian. The word Machiavellian is also used to denote “some action on the part of a state, a politician or even a friend. By calling an action Machiavellian we mean that it is selfish, cunning and without any moral justification”.

Though Machiavellism is used in pejorative sense we think that it is unjust because his method of analysis and objective cannot be subject of denouncement. The objective situation compelled him to advocate for an absolute power and separate politics from morality and religion. Many people may not like him or even may denounce him but a neutral assessment will support him.

**Machiavelli and Renaissance:**

Many critics of Western political thought prefer to call Machiavelli as the child of Renaissance. W. T. Jones says “Machiavelli was the child of Florence and of the Renaissance. All the qualities which characterise his city and his age appear in his own personality”.
An important aspect of Renaissance is that, coming under its influence, man began to judge and value everything, specially politics, in a new light. Even they scanned the values such as morality, justice, religion.

In the Middle Ages man was mesmerized by the church, Pope and, above all, by religion. He had no independent thinking power. But the advent of Renaissance changed this situation and man began to think of religion, values etc. by applying his own reason.

Machiavelli also adopted it. He broke the traditional path. He analysed social, political conditions in the light of new thought, reason and perspective. So both ordinary men and Machiavelli changed their line of thinking and way of values.

He thought that man was not created simply to follow the advice of church and adopt certain religious principles.

He also observed that the orthodox religion has considerably dwarfed his power of thinking and ability to follow or adapt reason. This created a precarious situation in the Italian society.

He observed that Renaissance everywhere of Europe created a new thought and advancement of learning. Renaissance inspired man to know more and to advance forward. But the people of Italy remained in darkness.

Machiavelli arrived at the decision that the people of Italy must be saved from this position and new thought shall be injected in their “blood”. Being influenced by Renaissance he thought in this line.

The study of history inculcated a new idea in his mind and that was the service and loyalty to God and church could never be a factor of social upliftment. For this purpose it is required that man must serve society and man. The influence of religion, ethics and morality must be removed and people must be made practical.

He declared that in public affairs religion, morality and ethics must have no status. Only a powerful prince with absolute power at his disposal can achieve
W. T. Jones writes: “A product of Renaissance, such as Machiavelli repudiates the old medieval nation of an objective moral order, determined by God, and in accordance with whose prescriptions men live best.

On the contrary, for him that life is best which brings fame, distinction, honours, and reputation to a man” Needless to say that Machiavelli received his materialistic outlook from the Renaissance. The Renaissance taught man the important lesson that if man desires better living and better situation he must look to the material situation—and not to God or religion or morality. All these are subjective and cannot help man to attain overall upliftment.

Before Renaissance man was the doll at the hands of Pope and this resulted in the loss of reason and rationality. But he must think that he is endowed with reason, rationality, and power of judgment. By applying all these qualities he can considerably improve his material condition.

The subservience to God, morality, religion has no power to change and improve man’s material condition. People of post-Renaissance period acquired this idea and Machiavelli thought it prudent to apply it for the general improvement of Italian society. This is materialism, and we also call it Machiavellism.

2. Reason of the State:
The most revolutionary aspect of Machiavelli’s idea about politics is the reason of the state. Ebenstein writes: Before Machiavelli all political writings—from Plato and Aristotle through Middle Ages to the Renaissance—had one central question—The end of the state.

Political power was assumed to be a means only—a means to the service of higher ends such as justice, the good life, freedom or God—Machiavelli ignores the issue of the end of the state in the extra-political terms. He assumes that power is an end in itself and he confines his inquiries into the means that are best suited to acquire, retain, and expand power.

The fact is that the central concept of Machiavelli’s political philosophy is the power of the state and, without power, the state is almost nothing. Studying history he formed the conclusion that only power can save Italy. If there is any
message in The Prince, then it is that the sole objectives of the prince shall be to acquire power to make the state self-sufficient in all respects so that it can compete with other states. This is called the reason of the state.

The concept—reason of the state—is regarded by many—constitutes the central idea of Machiavelli’s political theory or ideas. It means that a state may have many ambitious aims but the most important one is to strengthen its position by acquiring power because without power a state is almost nothing.

A true prince must accumulate physical power by any means and apply it for the sake of the state. In the Discourses he said: “A prince must build on sound foundation, otherwise he is bound to come to grief.

The main foundations of every state are good laws and good arms”. Why so much emphasis on arms and power? Machiavelli had a thorough knowledge about human nature. In order to fight human beings of this nature a prince must have enormous power.

The power of the prince means the power of the state. Hobbes also held the same view. The point, however, is, these issues or aspects have met at a single point and this point is—the nature of society, the nature of human beings and the duty of the prince. These three have combinedly constituted the concept of reason of the state.

Speaking about the reason of the state (or regione di state) Skinner maintains “Machiavelli’s The Prince was first printed in 1532, and thereafter the Machiavellian defenders of region di state showed an increasing disposition to argue that if the main aim of the political theorist is to offer genuinely useful advice on how to maintain one’s state, then the less edifying aspects of prevailing political practice ought to be acknowledged and even recommended rather than merely outlawed”.

Skinner also observes that many have condemned his concept—reason of the state. But it is to be well-remembered that there was no alternative way.
He wanted to save Italy from further deterioration and, in order to achieve that ambitious goal; the state of his imagination must have a positive and clear role. He did not think of a state in Platonic background.

Some critics also say that Machiavelli’s attitude towards religion, ethics and morality is unpardonable. But his idea of state and reason of the state are impressive.

He possessed a clear conception about human nature and for such nature a powerful state is essential. Here lies the reason of the state. From history he collected numerous instances why a very powerful state is needed.

Machiavelli was a practical man and he was not guided by any sentiment. That built up his reason of the state.

3. Power Politics and Self-Sufficient State:
Machiavelli’s two concepts—power politics and self-sufficient state—are closely connected. J. R. Hale in his article—Machiavelli and the Self-Sufficient State—observes: It is noteworthy how much Machiavelli sees politics as a battle—a constant struggle for power. All politics, in his sense, are power politics.

After the Second World War the whole world was in the grip of power politics which means most or all the big powers converted the whole world into a battle-field.

The leaders of the super or major powers believed that war was the only way to solve all the problems. Machiavelli, almost in the same way, treated war as the only instrument capable to solve social and political problems. He writes in The Prince “Therefore, if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need.

Everyone realizes how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word or to be straight-forward rather than in his dealings; nonetheless contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men
with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles.”

In the theory of power politics there is no place of honesty and scruples. The sole aim of the prince or ruler of the state would be to achieve the goal. This goal is the interest of the state. To make the state powerful so that it can fight any ill-design of another state.

In the thought and action of the prince the only idea will get priority: The state must be made powerful at any cost because without military power the state is quite incapable to achieve its objective.

In The Prince Machiavelli has elaborately discussed the concept of power: “There are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second.

So a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man…. Prince must know how to act according to the nature of both and that he cannot survive otherwise” (Machiavelli: The Prince). Machiavelli advised his prince to make a proper use of both law and brute force and in this way he was supposed to achieve success.

He advised his prince to sacrifice honesty, morality, religion for the benefit, or, more generally, for the cause of the state. It would never be regarded prudence on the part of the prince if he sacrifices the interest of the republic at the altar of honesty and religion. This is regarded as the reason of the state.

The interest of the state will be achieved if it is made all-powerful. He could not see anything of the state outside or beyond power. Both for survival and development of state power is indispensable. In the Discourses he has elaborated this idea. He supported his contention by drawing instances.

Another part or aspect of Machiavelli’s contribution to politics is his idea of self- sufficient state. His idea of power politics reason of state and self-sufficient state are all closely related, J. R. Hale in his illuminating article—
Machiavelli And the Self- Sufficient State has thrown ample light on this aspect.

He says that Machiavelli did not appeal to the Christian morality or religion for the benefit of the state. To him the state was all-in-all and he was not prepared to sacrifice a small part of the interest of the state.

Without a powerful state people's progress and welfare would remain unfulfilled. It is the reason of the state or raison d'etat. If the raison d'tat is achieved or successfully established the state will achieve the status of self-sufficiency. So behind the concept of power politics there was an idea of a self-sufficient state in his mind.

The word self-sufficient is really a comprehensive term. But to Machiavelli it had a definite connotation. In order to be self-sufficient a state first of all must be powerful so that it can defeat the ill-motives of foreign states.

After a state has achieved self-sufficiency in power (specially military power) it can land on other activities. The military power is at the top of all considerations.

In the concluding part of his analysis J. R. Hale writes “Machiavelli’s assumption that the state must pursue a policy of self-interest in terms of raison d'etat is not a Bible morality, was later echoed by theorists like Hegel, and men of action like Bismarck and Hitler.

Today the problem which Machiavelli stated is as urgent as ever” We think that what was true at the time of Machiavelli is still correct. Today the big or super powers are continuously fighting to establish their over-all supremacy.

They do not know where they will reach. Machiavelli thought that the accumulation of military power was the most prudent way to establish one’s supremacy. It was wrong. Even today the big or super powers think in the same line. It is also wrong.

However, Machiavelli of Florence is not dead; he is still alive in the minds of the leaders of today’s big powers.
Hale concludes:
We can throw away Machiavelli the bogey, but, if we are to think realistically about politics the state and the super-state perhaps we still need the pugnacious common sense of Machiavelli the man”. Both in national and international fields, power and politics are all-in-all. So we cannot blame Machiavelli.

4. Politics and Religion:
Renaissance, Luther, Calvin and Machiavelli are almost contemporary. Both democracy and individualism are the products of the Renaissance. But simultaneously despotism emerged along with them.

Church and papacy were forced to surrender their supremacy and dictatorial manner or functioning and the vacuum created in this way were forthwith filled up by the rise of monarchy.

The dominating power of kings became absolutely prominent. Out of democracy, individualism and despotism, only despotism was able to draw special attention of Machiavelli.

McClelland aptly observes:
In the Discourses Machiavelli makes it perfectly clear that the ruthless rule of a new prince is only one of the forms of government.

Machiavelli was quite acquainted with various forms of government including democracy or republicanism. But he preferred dictatorship or despotism as the most suitable form of government.

It is generally observed that he was the chief supporter of despotism because in his judgment only a despotic ruler could save Italy from the despicable condition. Somehow he arrived at the conclusion that a strong and powerful ruler was needed for Italy. Democracy could not save her. To Machiavelli politics was an end and its mechanism was military power.

He was chiefly concerned with the mechanics of government. He studied history of many European states and the knowledge he gathered was that Italy needed an autocratic government.
“He was not a prisoner of indecision. It was his conviction. He writes almost wholly of the mechanics of government, of the means by which states may be made strong of the politics by which they can expand their power”.

According to Sabine and many others political and military measures are of primary interest because Machiavelli thought that only these two had the power to save a state. He strongly advocated a separation between politics and religion and without this separation the state could not reach its goal. His open declaration was that the purpose of politics was to preserve and augment political power.

He was so adamant in this respect that he was not prepared to make any compromise. The policy adopted by the prince may be cruel, faithless or lawless, but that, is quite immaterial. The point is whether it could help the prince to achieve success.

The policy of the prince is quite moral or ethical and he is religious-minded but it is useless so far as its capacity to achieve success is concerned.

Machiavelli was not against morality, religion, ethics etc. Rather, he was indifferent. That is, he adopted an indifferent stand or attitude towards these. It is called moral indifference.

Machiavelli recommends a double standard of morality and ethics—one for the ruler and the other for the private citizens or persons. The reason suggested by Machiavelli is that the supreme objective of the prince is to achieve success in political fields: Religion, morality and ethics should not be allowed to stand on the way of success.

But the private persons have not such objectives and naturally they have the freedom to follow moral and religious ways. Machiavelli has suggested that the virtue of a prince is different from that of an ordinary person.

Skinner observes “the whole of Machiavelli’s advice is governed by a highly original sense of what should be taken to constitute true virtu in a prince………. With Machiavelli the concept of virtu is simply used to refer to
whatever range of qualities the prince may find it necessary to acquire in order to maintain his state and achieve great things”.

It is clear that morality, ethics and religion in the case of a prince are combinedly called virtu and the prince must adopt this virtu honestly. He should be least concerned with what happens in religion or morality.

By recommending the above Machiavelli clearly indicated the separation between politics and religion. This may also be called the “autonomy of politics”, which implies that the politics has an exclusively different world. This is called secularism of politics or secularisation of politics.

Machiavelli thought that politics and religion are different because their fields are separate. He had a firm belief that for all sorts of corruption in politics, religion is absolutely responsible.

A prince or a political man could never achieve success by scrupulously following religious, moral and ethical means. If a man becomes prince he should avoid moral and religious ways by all means.

There is emotion in morality and religion. A prince true to his name must give no recognition to the religious and moral feelings. Explaining the stand adopted by Machiavelli Skinner observes “if a ruler is genuinely concerned to maintain his state he will have to shake off the demands of Christian virtue, wholeheartedly embracing the very different morality which his situation dictates ”. It is to be noted here that “to maintain the state” and reason of the state are concepts of immense importance and Machiavelli took these seriously.

A state must be maintained in the face of all odds or adverse situations and a judicious prince must reject the conventional religion and morality. This is the fulcrum of Machiavellian concept of secularization of politics.

If a prince honestly follows the Christian virtue that will stand on the way of success. Hence he recommended two separate compartments—one for politics and the other for religion.
His clear view was that when the safety of our country is absolutely at stake there need be no question of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or disgraceful, but all other considerations set aside, that course alone is to be taken which may save our country and maintain its liberty. To him religion, ethics and morality were mystical concepts but the state was a real element.

He was out and out a materialist and for that reason he refused to give proper recognition to the mystical elements such as religion and morality State or politics has a separate and at the same time real or concrete domain.

Florence was the birthplace of Machiavelli and birthplace of several celebrities. But this Florence was in an ignoble position or situation which he could not tolerate. His idea was that Florence or any other state was reality and in that sense politics was also a reality. But religion is not a reality. Hence state and politics are reality.

5. Idea about State:
It would be wrong to brand Machiavelli as a systematic political philosopher or thinker or a theoretician about state. His main concern was his birthplace Florence and overall progress of Italy, especially Florence, an important centre of art and literature.

In The Prince he said:
“A prince must build on sound foundations of every state, new states as well as ancient or composite ones, are good laws and good arms” But above all the prince must focus his attention on building up a powerful army.

Only an army can make a state self-sufficient. Here we like to note that Machiavelli’s state was mainly a military state, it is not liberal or democratic state. He was not interested in democracy at all. He thought that with the help of military strength a state can achieve its object.

He was out and out a materialist and wanted to build up the concept of state on materialism. He did not run after idealism, philosophy, morality etc. Even he did not think in those lines and this was the special characteristic of Machiavelli’s state. G. W. Allen says: “He was really concerned only with the
actual states of his day. He had crude notions of how the states came into being and he had the idea that all institutions tend to corruption owing to inherent defects arising from the nature of man. He believed that out of corruption comes, or may come, new healthy growth and that all tend to move in a circle. He conceived the state as something very unstable”.

Machiavelli’s state was not only a military state, it was an absolutist state and above all it was a secular state. It was a state quite indifferent to morality, to religion, to ethics. We can say he predicted a twentieth century state—a state of power and politics.

Let us again quote Allen:
“Not only has it no vital relation to church it has no relation to God or to any cosmic purposes.” He had a firm conviction that religion, politics and ethics could not cohabit. The area of politics is absolutely separate from that of religion and morality. Today we frequently talk about secular state. But it is to be remembered that several centuries ago Machiavelli, the son of Florence, laid the foundation of such a state.”

Some interpreters of Machiavelli’s political thought are of opinion that he had an idea of nation-state. He wanted to demarcate the boundary of each state to ensure the proper administration and jurisdiction. In the opinion of a critic “That Machiavelli perceived the advantage to a government of having subjects similar in language, customs and habits of life, is quite clear.” In the last chapter of The Prince he had suggested that all the foreigners were to be ordered to leave Italy. He had the intention to convert Italy into one nation one state. This demand was revived in twentieth century. Today we frequently talk about right to self-determination—Machiavelli perhaps had that idea. Machiavelli had an apprehension that the foreigners were responsible for the present condition of Italy.

He had an apprehension that if the prince proceeds to drive away all the foreigners from the soil of Italy then armed conflict with other states was inevitable and, for that reason, he suggested that a prince must proceed to build up a strong army to strengthen his defence and must not depend on
mercenaries because they are useless and dangerous. Some critics may say that Machiavelli was a narrow-minded political thinker. May be so. But it is true that he was a patriot and loved his motherland more than any other contemporary politician.

6. Omnipotent Legislator:
Machiavelli’s concept of state or his philosophy is closely connected with his notion of omnipotent legislator.

He makes the following observation in Discourses:
“But we must assume, as a general rule, that it never or rarely happens that a republic or monarchy is well-constituted, or its old institutions entirely reformed, unless it is done by only one individual, it is even necessary that he whose mind has conceived such a constitution should be alone in carrying it into effect.”

We have already observed that Machiavelli’s main concern was a well-ordered and properly constituted state and he was fully conscious that law was the main instrument which was capable of achieving this objective. His belief was that only a good prince was unable to bring his state under proper administration.

Two instruments were necessary—one is good law and the other is well-regulated army. The prince first of all will try to administer the state with the help of law and, where necessary, army will be called. Interpreters of Machiavelli’s political thought are of opinion that he advised his prince to rely mainly on law.

Sabine observes “The law-giver is the architect not only of the state but of society as well, with all its moral, religious and economic institutions”.
Machiavelli received the importance of law from Greek political thought. In ancient Greece Solon (B.C. 638-559) was of opinion that law was the chief instrument which could ensure justice. Needless to say that Solon was a famous legislator.
He relied on good law and legislator on the ground that human nature was not always up to standard—men are corrupt and self-interest seeking. To cope or fight with them good laws are essential.

In his opinion human beings are selfish and egoist. To bring such persons under the administration, law was essential and for that reason he heavily relied upon law. To sum up, in Machiavelli’s view, law was the most important part of state administration.

But the question is why an omnipotent legislator. We have already quoted a long passage from Discourses. He said “it never or rarely happen a republic is well- administered unless it is done by only one individual.”

So we can easily conclude that he had no faith on any legislative body or legislature. His prince had no limit to what extent he could go and similarly his law-giver had unlimited power to make law.

Machiavelli does not clearly say whether his omnipotent legislator and king is the same person or not. But from his different comments in Discourses and The Prince it appears to us that he wanted to entrust the powers of law-making and administration in the same hands.

An able prince, he hoped, would be able to make good laws which would build a solid foundation for a prosperous state.

Sabine observes:
“He can tear down old states and build new, change forms of government, transplant populations and build new virtues into the character of his subjects” A good administrator is also a good legislator.

Machiavelli advised his prince to focus attention to both making of law and streamlining general administration. We can say that all his contemporaries were thinking of a good and all-powerful administration.

Like Plato, Machiavelli did not think of a philosopher king, but the idea of an able and powerful administrator was quite active in his mind. This is an
interesting aspect of Machiavelli’s political thought which we can call “Machiavellism”.

Of course there are other aspects of Machiavellism but Sabine is of opinion that it is an important aspect. Finally, Machiavelli says that to what extent a person is a good administrator and legislator that requires to be judged by his success.

Assessment of Political Ideas of Machiavelli:
The assessment of Machiavelli’s political thought can best be described in the words of Sabine. He says – “No man of his age saw so clearly the direction that political evolution was taking throughout Europe. No man knew better than he the archaism of the institutions that were being displaced or accepted more readily the part that naked force was playing in the process. Yet no one in that age appreciated more highly the inchoate sense of national unity on which this force was obscurely based. No one was more clearly aware of the moral and political corruption that went with the decay of long-accustomed loyalties and pieties”.

This assessment of Sabine is perfectly correct. Machiavelli had profound knowledge about social and political conditions of Italy and that created a lot of frustration and agony in his mind.

He was a great patriot and he thought that Italy could be saved from this ignoble condition. He, for that reason, adopted an uncompromising stand. He, it is true, took an uncompromising attitude towards religion, morality and ethics.

The dominating role of church and papacy was primarily responsible for the all-round deterioration of human society. He pinpointed it and suggested a way out. We may not agree with his suggestion, but the mere fact is that he had no other solution. “Indoctrinated as he was in the pagan revival in Italy he was unable both by training and temperament to grasp the constitutional and the moral ideals that European politics would carry over from the Middle Ages”

At the beginning of the sixteenth century constitutionalism was not highly rated as a good palliative for social and political malady. He understood the
malady and applied his knowledge and experience. We may not agree but we cannot blame him.

He was a materialist and, at the same time, realist. Berki says that Machiavelli had clear conception about all the aspects of his contemporary society. Let us quote few words from Berki – of course, in truth Machiavelli’s cynicism and practical concern are not the most important things about him, what we have to realise is that he had a clear and by no means ignoble, political vision” Every political philosopher is the product of his time and Machiavelli is no exception. Plato, Aristotle, Marx all luminaries fall within this category. He believed that only a powerful prince could save Italy.

Interesting to note that in the second half of the twentieth century the leaders of the superpowers followed the same track which created several crises.

We do not know whether Machiavelli’s prince followed his advice. But politician of seventies and eighties of the twentieth century exactly did the same thing. Machiavelli’s state is the real state.

It is never the embodiment of Christian values or morality. The state has an autonomous value and that value is the power of the state. This is the reason of the state or raison d’état. He advised his prince to make the republic as strong as possible so that it would have not to depend upon others.

We know that erstwhile Soviet Union and United States did the same thing in the fifties and sixties of the last century. In 1969 the 500th birth anniversary of Machiavelli was observed in many parts of the Western World. This indicates that Machiavelli’s political thought has lasting value and this relates to his concept of power and particularly power politics.

Machiavelli was quite aware that misdistribution of poverty was the chief factor of conflict among the various classes of society. Both Marx and Engels recognized it. He believed that a powerful prince with enormous military power could save the society from this evil. He did not think of revolution. But it is not his fault. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the socio-economic-political condition of Italy was not ripe for a revolution and for that reason he did not lay emphasis on revolution.
“Machiavelli anticipates Hobbes in believing that the glory of a prince can consist of nothing but the prosperity and contentment of his people” If a prince succeeds in unifying and strengthening his republic that will ensure the all-round prosperity of the state. We can remember that Thomas Hobbes also thought almost in the same line.

In his opinion the anarchy of the state of nature was not congenial for the progress of the society and for that reason he suggested that a new society would be built up at the head of which there shall be a powerful sovereign authority.

The sovereign authority will rule the state with law and sword. There is hardly any difference between Machiavelli’s prince and Hobbes’ Leviathan. In the strictest sense, both are of the same category.

Some critics charge him as the founder of fascism. The Michigan University has published a collection of essays under the title—“Communism, Fascism and Democracy—The Theoretical Foundations.

In one of the essays Machiavelli has been depicted as the supporter of fascism. Fascism does not understand anything other than power and, more particularly, naked and unscrupulous power. Machiavelli advised his prince to adopt such power. Like Machiavelli, Hegel was also the worshipper of absolute power. Hitler was the disciple of these two thinkers.

Machiavelli was also a supporter of the bourgeoisie. As a result of Renaissance the trade and communication among nations expanded at a meteoric rate and some adventurist people earned a lot of money from trade and business. These people constituted a class called the capitalist class.

Although, this class at the time of Machiavelli was just emerging or in nascent condition. He thought it his duty to support the cause if this class. His conviction was that an absolute monarchy would be the best possible form of government. This led him to support absolute monarchy.
Bullet Points to remember:

- The state should be a nation state.
- State is the highest form of social organization to promote and protect human welfare.
- The prince (king) should be most powerful to rule the fool people.
- Men are born bad. There is no inherent virtue and goodness in them.
- They are ungrateful, fickle (unable to decide), deceitful and coward driven by the motives of fear, lust for power, vanity and self interest.
- Men are more prone to evil than to good.
- The method of the government must therefore be one, i.e., force to bring such people into the track, to control them, to fulfill their desire of protection of life and property.
- Force breeds fear and fear is more disciplinary than love.
- It is through force and repression that the innate evil tendencies, selfishness and aggressiveness in men can be kept under check and control.
- The king should always be respected and fearful before the people.
- One should be confident that force used by the prince (king) is for the benefit of the people.
- According to Cook, ‘Prince of Machiavelli is meant ruler to be dictator for public good not for his own pleasure and profit’.
- The king must take advice from all but decision should be of his own.
- The security of life and property of the people should be managed properly.
- Neither in power not in possession, there is any limit to human desire.
- Desire for both power and possession are in perpetual strife and competition which could lead to anarchy, so they would be silent by the imposition of force only in the cost of security of life and property.
- An individual would more readily forgive the murder of his father than the confiscation of his patrimony.
- Fear of punishment should be wide spread.
- There are no words of religion and morality in the dictionary of politics.
- State was neither moral nor immoral but non-moral.
- So every means is justified if it is calculated to lead to the desired ends. State power is primary, religion and church is secondary having separate jurisdiction.
- The prince cold use any means—fraud, forgery, trickery, breach of faith but should be powerful and forceful.
- Prince should not use mercenary soldiers in his nation but should prepare own strong national army.
- National army should always be loyal to king.
- The prince should always be ready for war.
- The prince should manage the balance of power in international affairs and maintain diplomatic relations, as far as possible, with many countries.
- The government should be established in accordance with the development of society.
- In educated, developed and public spirited society, the republican government (‘Discourses on Levy’) is the best form of government.
- But anyway, the government should always be forceful, powerful and strong.
- To Machiavelli, “Power is the end (goal) of the state.”