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Evolution of “State Ruling”

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Abstract

The concept of ruling a state was investigated by Machiavelli as early as in the sixteenth century. The concept gradually developed throughout centuries and finally achieved a certain level of maturity in today's politics.

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1. Introduction

This is essentially a review article based on a work of Michel Foucault (1979) about governmentality. The difficult article, a translation from Italian, was transformed into plain language without jeopardizing the meaning and commented on by notes. When possible, comparisons from Turkish history were provided among those notes.

The state is a fanciful topic. Everybody does some thinking (1) about it. Young, passionately committed revolutionaries crave for it. Few are known to be indifferent (2) to it.

From the sixteenth century onwards, the art of governing came to be an important topic for whose sake it was proper to consecrate many thoughts.

These are the times when feudalism was collapsing, giving way to big nation-states and even colonial states. The Reformation movement had its impact on minds, questioning the former eternal bliss (3) understandings (paraphrased from Foucault 1979).

Up to the Middle Ages it was common to associate the right to rule with divine causes. But during the Italian Renaissance, in Florence, Machiavelli (1469-1527) wrote the Prince, advising a sovereign how to rule. The book

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isolates the ruling authority from its spiritual and ethical connotations, founding it on sheer human reasoning. It advocates an omnipotent monarch for whom everything is permissible to maintain and increase (4) his power. The book drew much attention and praise, obviously because it favored the vested interests of rulers (ibid.).

2. The Book Reappears

In late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the book made surface again. The political conjecture was in search of guidelines about state, authority, power, absolutism, delegation or limiting of the power etc. New movements and counter-movements were constantly going on: on one side Napoleon was instigating emperorship (5) (and thus in a way retrieving kingdom) and rendering the revolutionary ideas ineffective for a time. On the other hand, American colonies (6) were revolting against the British Empire and so forth (ibid.).

The Prince was a book particularly favored by the nineteenth century Germany and Italy (ibid.).

[This is no wonder. Both were militaristic structures craving for power. Garibaldi can be considered the Italian equivalent of ferocious Bismarck.

“German fascism is now interpreted increasingly as the positive completion of Prussian-German (7) national power politics. The ‘national community’ now rehabilitated socially, politically and historically, is associated with the ‘powerful state’ concept and employed at home and abroad as legitimation for a new departure in politics” (Roth 1994: 453).

As Wit (1953: 271) puts it, “the fundamental ideological disunity of the German people” later gives way to “the autocratic imposition of Bismarck’s unity by blood and iron”].

All criticisms of Machiavelli are not favoring him. Both Catholic and Protestant Christian circles did indeed vehemently condemn (8) him (ibid.).

In Machiavelli’s conceiving, the prince himself is not an innate part of the principality. He is an outsider despite being the possessor. Moreover, how he owned the principality (inheritance, conquest, appropriation etc.) does not matter, either (ibid.).

Besides, his possession does not pertain to his subjects or territory; rather, it is his domineering behavior over his possessions which is important. The ruler’s main concern is to prolong for as long as possible the enjoyment of his rule by defending it against any menace whatsoever which could deprive him of this enjoyment (9) (ibid.).

3. New Ideas Emerge

This idea of clinging to power was to be challenged by the concept of the art of government, whose earliest thinker is Guillaume de la Perriere (ibid.).

Here the word “govern” takes on a broad scope like governing any institution large or small. Moreover, this sort of governor is an innate, internal part of the governed entity. Now; the concept includes morality, proper handling of the administration / management of all sources including the human element (oeconomy) and politics (10) (ibid.).

La Mothe le Vayer provides these ideas in his didactic work addressed to the heir of the ruler. One essential factor is the ruler’s worth and deserving for the position; that is, his formation (11) which enables him for the post. Another closely related factor is the control mechanism over the governed to make sure that they “behave themselves” (ibid.).

In the eighteenth century, Rousseau, in an article on political economy, emphasized that wise governing would lead to the betterment of all beings (human and material) within the ruler’s domain (ibid.).

Rousseau’s contemporary thinker Quesnay coined the phrase “economic government”. In this text the former oeconomy now qualifies a far more complicated and on-going process, whereby all efforts must lead to convenience as the end-product (ibid.).

For Machiavelli, the exertion of power was realized simply on the territory and the inhabitants living on that territory, in a very concrete manner, regardless of the high or low quality of those “assets” (ibid.).

la Perriere, however, furthers the exertion of this power —borrowing Foucault’s exact expression— to the “the complex unit constituted by men and things”. Here, Foucault likens the ruler to the all-responsible captain of a ship sailing on the sea. He must take into account all possible happenings, strong winds and storms included. One might as well call this role the highest form of serving the ship. Size and quantity considerations are thus replaced by

quality considerations (Frederick the Second's comparison of a big but inert land, tsarist Russia, with a small but firm and effective one, Holland, is very meaningful in that respect).

4. Ideas Get Further Elaborated

Governing a unit thus is distinguishable from being sovereign over it. Sovereignty now involves "attaining and conserving public utility" (ibid.).

As Puffendorf of the seventeenth century puts it, mutual respect, role division and order come into account. But, interestingly, order is established by obedience to law and this brings us back to Machiavelli at that particular point! here is an unavoidable tautology, a circulatory notion [like the well-known chicken and egg issue] (ibid.).

As a state of law, absolute monarchy too may dictate the primacy of written laws, regardless of their nature (12) (ibid.).

In government rather than a fidelity for the written law per se, tactics (13) is what really counts as a perfection of the governing process (ibid.).

Phsiocrats of the of the seventeenth century openly said that laws alone (14) do not suffice to attain the aims of governments (ibid.).

What we now know as democratic leadership, was proposed by la Perriere as a "patient ruler", one who is not eager to kill or crush (like the queen-bee of a hive). He also mentions about "wisdom" (in the sense of efficiency, without divine associations (15) involved) and "diligence" (in the sense of a fatherly commitment and affection, inducing a role-model-behavior on the part of the ruler) (ibid.).

Finally Foucault (Autumn, 1979) notes that the new but rough notion of the art of government did find actual applications even in the sixteenth century. Its component were administrative apparatus of monarchies; quantified knowledge, i.e. statistics and mercantilism and police force. However the concretization of the state came to a halt in the troublesome seventeenth century with wars, rebellions and financial crises; so, the contract (16) theory came into being as a compromise between the art of government and sovereignty.

5. The Importance of Population

What brought up the art of government was the population expansion and the transformation of mercantilism into a fully grown capitalism in the eighteenth century. It is only then that the science of government shifted to an economical structure in the current meaning of the word "economy". Former mercantilist statistics were now employed for demographic (17) considerations (ibid.).

Statistical knowledge on population behavior clarify the fact that government affairs can not be reduced to the level of an exemplary family since a family is a minute subset of the big population and can hardly represent it as a model (ibid.).

This perception speeded up the dynamics of the art of government, leading all efforts to the betterment of population quality. The population gained priority over the ruler and tactics became accordingly more sophisticated (ibid.).

The new science of political economy focusing on the population-territory-wealth interaction furthered the art of government up to the level of political science (ibid.).

The matter of sovereignty is still there to reckon, as grounds for the form of governing. Rousseau's social contract deals with that subject thoroughly. Neither is discipline omitted; it is a necessity for the management of even the pacifist masses (ibid.).

Thus; sovereignty, discipline and government are like the vertices of a triangle, all working on population on a background of security concern. Government, population and political economy are similarly interrelated (ibid.).

6. Conclusion

The state of justice of the Middle Ages incrementally made its way to a state of management ever since the sixteenth century. Nowadays, the state; with all its complicated techniques and tools of dealing with problems (which could be briefly called “savoir-faire”) is becoming more and more a topic of political science (ibid.).

Notes

1) The typical Turkish peasant regards that awesome entity as the “Government Father” and accordingly holds it responsible for all facets of his life, including his miserable plight in a natural drought! If anything goes wrong in his dealings with any official institution, he angrily sends out a mouthful of swearing words aimed at that very state. Nevertheless, he cunningly avoids a deep meditation over a complicated social problem, passing it on to those who are at the head. Let them worry about, he would say.

2) In ancient Egypt, state was so precious that the government-elite diverted political attentions of the masses by forcefully employing them in endless pyramid construction works. The Albanian writer Ismail Kadare provides an insight to ancient Egypt in his historical novel, the Pyramid. Those works were deliberately started in periods of prosperity. Leisure time leads to free thought, which in turn, to politics.

A man who stayed away from political might is the maverick, vagabond-spirited poet (and mathematician) Omar Khayyam. He rejected the vizierate offer of the Seljukid sultan Malikshah. The post went to Nizam al-Mulk. Khayyam had been right. Nizam would pay for it with his life under the dagger strikes of a Hashashin envoy sent out from the stronghold of Alamut. “On the night of Friday, the twelfth of Ramadan of the year 485, in Nihavand. the fida’I came in the guise of a Sufi the the litter of Nizam, who was being born to the tent of his women, and struck him with a knife, and by that blow he suffered martyrdom” (Lewis 1967: 47)

3) From the struggle between Papacy and empires, from the dissolving of feudalism, came into being in Europe a plurality of states with no linkages among them. They all had new characteristics. In the new sense of the word, state becomes a big political and social entity, which is stronger than the ancient states (Alvarez, 1959:71).

4) The intent of Machiavelli was not being scientific alone. He meant to gain the favor of the new political potency. Italy should unify. Who can achieve this? A prince in whose opinion all ways are legitimate to attain the goal. Machiavelli defined antic thoughts as well as the Middle Ages’ thoughts. For Aristo, for the Stoics and for the Christians the goal of the state is ethical. For Machiavelli power, aggressiveness, cunning and hypocrisy are means of obtaining desired goals (Sarica, 1987: 51-53).

5) During his crowning ceremony Napoleon addressed to the audience in the following manner: ‘Ladies, gentlemen, what is this fuss and uproar about? Some of you might think: who is this Corsican to deserve the title of emperor. But each nobility does have its beginning and my nobility is commencing right here!’ (Versan, 1976)

6) “Revolutions often spawn permanent presidents, emperors and kings. But the American Revolution did not end that way. Contrary to many historical examples, George Washington rejected personal power. He had no desire to become an American Caesar or Cromwell. Liberty, he said, was the basis for the American independence and the national character, ‘and whoever would dare to sap the foundation, or overturn the structure under whatever specious pretexts he may attempt it, will merit the bitterest execration and the severest punishment’ ” (Maslowski, April 1990: 23).

7) The military might of Prussians was admired by the Ottomans. The superstitious sultan, Mustapha III (1757-1774) once asked Frederic II to send him three astrologers (fortune-tellers) as military advisors. The emperor replied that his astrologers were his staff officers and gave the following advice: “The sultan should study history, evaluate the former experiences and possess a good army” (Renkli Osmanlı Padisahları Albumu w.date). (This should not seem so horrifyingly a case of ignorance for the times. Though not totally relying on fortune-telling, many kings were known to touch the concept. In a historical novel Barbara Cartland depicts Napoleon himself as a superstitious man in need of the advice of his astrologer). The relationships of the Ottomans with the German military steadily grew stronger. Cetin Altan, in his autobiographical novel (the French version’s title is *etroite surveillance*) narrates his memories about his pasha grand father, who speaks German fluently with his guests. He had been trained in Germany as a young Ottoman officer. While preparing his pavillon for the reception of the German guests, the pasha engages in a frantic search for the missing small bust of Wilhelm II, a former souvenir of his days in Germany. The

entire household get to work and finally they discover the tiny statue in one of the toilets. The pious grand mother had dumped “that profane idol” there once and forgotten all about it.

8) This reaction is expected not only because of the moral nature of the religion but also because of the religion’s vested interest itself is at stake on such cases. Strong ideologies come like substitutes and are accordingly menacing for true religions. I remember a class discussion in my senior high school class between an enthusiastic leftist student and the American literature teacher. At one point the teacher referred to communism as his new religion and the student stopped arguing as if struck by thunder all of a sudden. The modern world, for its part, makes us see that traditional religious beliefs are replaced by new systems like Nazism and Communism. These movements are often called pseudo-religions. I would rather claim that they are primitive specimens of religions of a new type, based not on supernatural foundations but instead on social foundations. [Thus] they are inspired by a marked hostility toward the previous creeds (Huxley, 1955: 62).

9) Nearly two decades ago a Turkish full general, a man reputed to be a harsh commander and “the last representative of the Prussian style” in the words of a journalist, could not obtain one higher position, even though the khaki color tradition would have favored it. Upon his obligatory retirement, his wife made a comment instead of the general himself. She said their rightful morsel was taken away not even from their mouths but from their very stomachs! At a time where almost all lips claim a post to be an opportunity to serve, this statement is at least free from possible hypocrisy in the sense that it dares define an official post as a personal privilege, in a rather straightforward manner.

10) The definition of politics is rather difficult: “There is no correct definition of politics. It seems to us best to retain an open mind and to accept the possibility of labeling as ‘political’ a wide range of activities, institutional arrangements and ideas than might seem immediately appropriate (Ponton & Gill, 1988: 9).

11) The Ottoman dynasty seems to have accepted this preparation and formation of future rulers from its earliest times onwards. Possible heirs to the throne were assigned to provinces (sancak) in Anatolia as governors at tender age. Selim the Grim (Selim the First) had ruled Trabzon; Magnificent Suleiman had ruled Manisa in their puberty years. The side-effect of able shehzades (princes) was a dispute over the throne after the deceased father, which led to fratricides. Later, to avoid fratricide, a tradition developed whereby the princes were reared in a special spacious “cage” within the harem section of the Seraglio. The losers of the throne usually kept living in the cage. The ascender of the throne, a cultural product of the cage himself, was accordingly broken off from the real world and devoid of experience / Erlebnis with respect to earlier young sultans.

12) Again looking at the Ottoman History, when Mehmet the Conqueror favored and put into written code fratricide —whereby he who first gets the throne may put his rivaling brothers to death— he did this for the sake of the survival of the state with a governmental outlook. On the other hand, when Magnificent Suleiman ordered the death of his son Mustapha, personal vested interest was the motive. Mustapha had been an able burgeoning statesman, a far better candidate than Selim the Sot (Selim the Second), who were to ascend the throne later. Mustapha could have revolted and replaced his father successfully, moral aspect put aside. “[During the Persian campaign Mustapha, governor of Amasia, was urgently summoned to the camp of his father]. Before he entered, he put off the dagger sheathed at his side. He awaited his father in a gorgeous tent chamber. Suleiman never came. Instead, closed in the executioners. The giant Negroes stealthily crept on. [To insure discretion in such a deed as this the tongues of the castrated blacks were torn out and their ears pierced for deafness] (Downey, 1929: 248-249). Suleiman’s father Selim the Grim had taken the throne from his father Bayazid the Second by force, previously. (Selim’s army had beaten Bayazid’s army and Selim had accorded a forced retirement to his father). Suleiman probably took lesson in that event and chose to be too cautious and merciless against Mustapha in an even slightly similar probable development.

13) Here too the Ottomans had parallel pragmatic applications. One such practice was confiscation of the assets from private and persons or institutions, until the Reformation (Tanzimat) Era in 1839. Fotic (1994: 33, 39) gives an example of confiscation over an institution: “[During the reign of Selim II (1566-1574)] the central Ottoman authorities decided to confiscate all the church and monastery estates [in the Balkans] and sell them, giving them the possibility of buying everything back. With this measure the state exerted strong financial pressure on the already quite impoverished church. Most of the monasteries somehow managed to buy back the largest part of their estates.

[The aim was] to standardize, define and coordinate with the Sharia one of the key parts of the legal system: land relations”.

14) As Versan (1976) put it, the more written laws there are, the more violations occur in practice. England, “the cradle of democracy” does not even possess a written constitution. A long state tradition constitutes the best remedy as a constitution.

15) The word “wisdom” may otherwise, have religious connotations. In fact, the equivalent of the word in Sufi Islam tradition is “hikmet”. It is a great virtue and represents a combination of pure intuition (irfan), on one hand and pure science (ilim) on the other hand. An open-hearted but thoroughly ignorant-of-positive-sciences person may attain the former alone through spiritual love and commitment. Even an atheist scholar may obtain the latter alone through ingenuity and hard toil.

16) The first contract in the Ottoman history about a century afterwards in 1808 between the provincial notables (ayan) and Mahmud the Second at Kagithane: “According to this Document of Agreement (ened-I İttifak) the provincial governors confirmed their loyalty to the sultan and in return the sultan promised to levy taxes justly and fairly” (Shaw and Shaw 1992: 2). In the opinion of Uçok (1978: 57) some Turkish Law scholars accept this document as the first (primitive) constitutional text.

17) Perhaps the earliest attempts of what comes close to a crude census were used for military purposes. Bertolt Brecht refers to that in a satirical manner in his play *Mother Courage and her Children* from the mouth of one of his characters. A sergeant enumerates the benefits of war and says that in war time you keep record of all goods, of all men and everything is calculated. In fact the first census in Ottomans was realized during the reign of Mahmud the Second with military purposes and only the male population was counted.

Visual Supplement

The following pictures (Fig. 1, Fig. 2 & Fig. 3) were re-drawn with some adaptations from French comic-strips; by the author himself (S.C.); while studying that language intensively, in previous years.



Fig. 1. Political history involves armed rebellions to authority, like the big French revolution.



Fig. 2. Some nations had gone through unfortunate civil wars, like the United States.



Fig. 3. The War of Roses in Britain represents another armed conflict between dynasties competing for the Throne.

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