

America's Domestic and International Politics: Based on the Theory of Machiavelli, Schmitt and Foucault

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Abstract. In the research of the political science, the combination of political theory and real political situation provides an interesting and important perspective. This paper aims to use the theory of three great thinkers in history to observe and analyze America's domestic and international politics. A lot of research and paper have given comprehensive and meticulous investigation on American politics. In fact, the study about America is an interdisciplinary field, which attracts a lot of attention through many years. There were also many great scholars who used their unique perspective to interpretate Machiavelli, Schmitt and Foucault's theory. Some of their interpretations are inevitable for us to read and learn, and some of them are highly relevant to the present and have received more and more attention. This paper will definitely absorb these beneficial outcomes, but it will not intend to make any innovative contribution to the study of American politics and political theory. The case and the angle in the paper are selected just for author's personal preference. But the analysis will be based on the original text and the most classical theory of the three thinkers. The paper will bring the readers to a journey, inviting three great thinkers to help improve their understanding of a political context and letting them to realize the complexity of the political issues. If there is really some innovation in this paper, it might be an attempt to present the theory of the three thinkers in a new context. The different parts of this paper are basically independent, but the readers will still see the invisible connection between the three thinkers and their intersection in an American context.

Keywords: American politics, Machiavelli, Schmitt, Foucault.

1. Introduction

America is an exciting country, whose history and politics attracts theorists from different generation to analyze it from different angles. In 2019, New York Times launched a project, which is called "The 1619 Project", criticizing America's racism and slavocracy history, trying to smash the myth of America's founding [1]. For a long time, the myth has been created and inherited by the conservative historians. Here we see a conflict between two different versions of American history. This is partly because there are always two opposite views of nearly all political issues in America, especially when polarization becomes the main problem of contemporary American politics. Besides, America has been long seen as a turbulent country, which is marked by violence, control of power, the hypocritical and immoral politicians and its uncertain foreign policy. To explain all these phenomena, people need to not only think from our own standpoint, but also step out of their biases, and look for ideas from the great thinkers in history. This is what this paper will try to do. Through it, the readers can have a more comprehensive and objective understanding of America's political situation.

2. Machiavelli and the Founding of the United States

When talking about the politics of a country, people must back to where it started. In America, it might be 1787, when the constitution was born. But what was behind the institution? What the ideas behind the institution came from? Answering these questions means people try to find the root and the essence of politics. The first thing this paper try to explain is the founding of the United state. It will help people understand the more present situation of American politics.

2.1. The Dispute about America's Founding

After the second world war, a debate about Machiavelli has arisen in the field of political philosophy. There were two conflict interpretative versions of Machiavelli and this debate involved the dispute about America's founding. For a long time, Machiavelli's theory, which often summarized as Machiavellianism, has suffered a bad reputation. From the beginning of the dispute, Leo Strauss inherited this critical tradition. He wrote a book, which is called *Thoughts on Machiavelli* to clarify it. Strauss pointed out that Machiavelli abandoned the classical tradition of political philosophy, but he was critical for it [2]. He thought Machiavelli only discussed how people actually live, rather than what human's life should be, which was the question the classical political philosophers preferred. Strauss differentiated the civil society and the good society. The former was advocated by Machiavelli according to Strauss, but it excluded morality [3]. Actually, the exclusion of morality composed an important reason why Strauss criticized Machiavelli. That was why he called Machiavelli the Evil Mentor. Also in his book, Strauss began to discuss the principle of America's founding. From Leo Strauss point of view, the founding of America was a myth, and he explicitly pointed out what Machiavelli would think about this. He worried that Machiavelli would argue that America's founding was based on the violence and conflicts, which characterized the slavocracy and the killing of Indians [3]. Here Strauss obviously discovered that America's founding had some relations with Machiavelli's thought. He was right. In fact, the fundamental principle of America's founding drew lesson from Machiavelli's republicanism thought, which came from the classical republicanism in Rome.

2.2. Machiavelli's Republicanism Thought and Its Influence on the Founding Ideas of America

The spirit of liberty, the enforcement of power, and the cultivation of civic virtues all marked the similarity between the federalists and Machiavelli [4]. From classical republicanism's view, the militia, rather than the standing army and the mercenary army, was the foundation of the spirit of the republicanism and the civic virtues [5]. This is why when Machiavelli was a politician in the Republic of Florence, after being disappointed with the mercenary army of Florence, he strongly advocated to form the national army, which was comprised by citizens of the republic. In the famous Second Amendment to the Constitution of America, the emphasis on the role of militia is a good example how the founding ideals of America were affected by Machiavelli's republicanism thoughts. These thoughts mainly came from his book *The Discourses*. In this book, he explained how Rome rose to become a "free state". In his argument, he revealed his preference to the republican. He emphasized fortune, but more crucially liberty and virtue. He also proposed how to prevent people sliding into corruption [4]. Machiavelli seems to present a more moderate image in *The Discourses* than in *The Prince*, but his thought in these two books is highly relevant. In both of them, he told us how to build power and rule a state, which had many democratic republican characteristics. The founding fathers of America absorbed his innovative ideas to build their ideal republic. However, the reality of America nowadays is totally different from what these politicians thought. Actually, the constitution of America embodied the classical liberalism of John Locke [1]. The tension between liberalism and republicanism in the constitution was noticed by the scholars of Cambridge school. They admitted the great contribution Machiavelli made in the history of political thought, but compared to the Leo Strauss and his students, they justified and praised Machiavelli's republicanism thought. More importantly, they wanted people to value more the influence the republicanism, not the liberalism on the founding ideas of America. The debate between the two sides went on for years and Isaiah Berlin joined the camp of Cambridge school [6]. Nonetheless, they probably realized the ideal of republicanism was actually abandoned by the later American politicians. The most obvious feature of this transformation was the birth of the party politics. It got stronger and stronger and a system similar to a two-party system has been formed. Today, America's democratic institution receives a large amount of criticism due to its stiff and split domestic politics.

3. Machiavelli, Schmitt and the Conflict in American Politics

After the initial founding story and the dispute about it, people can see the tortuous history and how it shaped today's America. The recurring themes in history are still the main component of contemporary politics. At least they reflect part of the truth and represent some continuity. If people want to extract a main line of American history or find a way to investigate American politics, the conflict can be a good starting point. When talking about American history and politics, people will find Machiavelli's shadow in lots of places.

3.1. The Conflict and Its Importance in American History

Conflict is probably the most remarkable feature of American politics. No matter the conflict between democrats and republicans, or between different group of people, it has long existed and become more and more common and extreme. Conflict has been a central theme in American history. America was born in conflict between the ruler and the people. It went through a catastrophic civil war, and the conflict inside it has never stopped. The segregation replaced slavocracy in south, empowering the racism and radicalizing the conflict between different races, and the black people kept struggling and fighting against all the injustice, until the civil rights movement finally made some progress on the law. However, the race problem is still the most serious problem in American society nowadays. Nobody knows how long this conflict will last. The blood and sacrifice of American people build America itself. Without these conflicts, many progresses wouldn't be made, and America wouldn't be what it is today.

3.2. Schmitt's Definition of the Political and Its Reflection on the Problem of American Politics

American history and politics can well reflect what Machiavelli and Carl Schmitt thought about politics. Actually, they had similar views on what is "the political" and human nature. Carl Schmitt thought politics has its own domain, and the distinction between friend and enemy defines what is "the political". He stressed the normality of conflict in politics [7]. It is a very realistic view of politics. Not only America, the conflict is the reality of the most countries, and probably will always be a part of the world, because human nature is basically immoral. Schmitt's theory is mainly discussed in the context of international relations. His ideas were related to the expansion of Germany under Nazi leadership. In domestic politics, states can involve the friend and enemy conflict into a peaceful order, and in that sense, politics can be transformed into laws. But the conflict will still exist despite the law [1]. Therefore, the friend and enemy distinction will still be important.

3.3. Machiavelli's Thought and Its Reflection on the Positive Aspect of Conflict in American Politics

However, Schmitt did not give a value judgement of conflict, neither Machiavelli. But Machiavelli showed a tendency to emphasize the positive side of conflict. Different with the classical thinkers, he thought human nature is selfish [8]. Conflict is inevitable, and sometimes necessary. In the Discourses, he described the conflict between the civilian and the aristocrat in Rome. In this context, the civilian protested the oppression of the aristocracy of the Senate. It contributed to the establishment of bailiffs and the revise of the laws. In Machiavelli's view, this was how Rome kept its liberty, which made it a perfect republic. Hence, the conflict was related to the private freedom [1]. Here, he took a very populist perspective, very different from his image in The Prince. If we look at the institution of America since its foundation, we will detect the seeds of conflict inside it. Once again, Machiavelli hit the nail on the head. The tension between the federal and the states and the separation of the three powers were rooted in the U.S. Constitution. This institution was responsible for the civil war and the polarized domestic politics, but it also built vitality, embracing different points of view, ensuring the individual freedom in a multinational country. But Machiavelli did not stop here and boast its modern republican view. In contrast, he warned us if the conflict lost control, how dangerous it would be. The

history of Florence, which was his homeland, was the best example of his warning. He explained the terrible consequences when conflict became negative faction. In *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli presented his reflection on the conflict between the civilian and the aristocrat [1]. Florence is actually a mirror to reflect America's polarized politics. Will America become the next Florence? Or conversely, the next Rome.

4. Machiavelli, Foucault and the Governing Rule of American Government

Every country is built by power. Machiavelli was a good teacher who taught rulers how to maintain it. Power is indispensable, and basically political. In 20th century, Foucault told people they should warn the power, because it was embedded into our lives in such subtle forms. America is like any other countries in the world. Some people say it is a great country, while others cannot agree. However, people can all see the dark side of the politics and the power. Actually, America is a good example to reflect the rule of such things.

4.1. Machiavelli's Thought in *The Prince* and Its Reflection on the Behavior of the Parties and the Presidents of America

Machiavelli thought the prince should learn how not to be good. He can sometimes do something immoral, but he should appear to be good [8]. Machiavelli wanted to tell the prince the technique to rule a state. The prince can be any other rulers, whatever the kings or the politicians in modern countries. Actually, the prince Machiavelli described in his book can be seen as the prototype of modern parties or politicians in modern democratic countries. What they actually do is to pursue power by seeking support from people. They all want to utilize some resorts as far as possible to achieve their goals. Modern parties and politicians only have less resorts to utilize. They mainly seek support by gaining the ballot [1]. So, when we look back the American politics, we will find the president and the government are doing the same thing. Afghanistan war and Iraq war were both started by George W Bush, and he claimed they are just. There were many people in America who strongly opposed the Iraq war, but there were also solid voters who supported all policies made by Bush. Here we can see Bush, as a mature modern politician, perfectly followed the Machiavelli's rule. But how about the domestic policy of American government?

4.2. Foucault's Disciplinary Power in American Society and Its Reflection on A Growing Problem on A Global Scale

In a book, which is called *the counterrevolution: how our government went to war against its own citizens*, the author described how American government supervised its citizens in a digital society [9]. It is a good example of Foucault's disciplinary power. In reality, the power comes from everywhere in our daily lives. It comes from our phones, social media, and games, which we like very much, but we cannot realize its existence. So, it is not just the problem of America, it is also an increasingly threat to our personal freedom in every country. In Byung-Chul Han's critique of neoliberalism, he described a regime of technological domination that, in contrast to Foucault's biopower, has discovered the productive force of the psyche [10]. It reveals how digital technology is manipulating our feeling in the age of big data. It is an effective extension to Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, which further intensifies our understanding of the crisis of personal freedom in this age.

5. Conclusion

This paper tries to use three different thinkers to provide an overview look of America's political situation. It includes both domestic and international dimensions. As said in the abstract, this paper doesn't try to pose any new questions and give an answer. This paper only wants to explain things. It gives a brief review of the basic theory of the three thinkers, as the theoretical basis. The focus is on

the case. That is, the America. But it does not limit the political situation on the time and the space. It talks about what happened in the past and what problems the whole world face now. People may find the author change the topic and include too many things in the paper but don't have a key point, or a main line. This paper doesn't follow traditional ways. It is certainly not a scientific research paper, but nor a case study, because the cases in it are not clear and precise. It actually talks about history and institution. These are more important factors in social science, not the isolated events. They are more general, but can be rules. What this paper tries to do is to find the connections between the fact and the theory. What the paper talks about are suitable cases to achieve this goal. This paper does not contribute to any new things, but it hopes the academic research encourage diversity and do not put too many limitations on how the author convey their thoughts. What more important is the thought itself, not the approach and the resort. This paper will provide some thought-provoking points and inspire people to think. If that is really so, the author will achieve what one wishes.

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