

Machiavellianism: A Critical Appraisal

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Received date: 02 March 2023; Accepted date: 12 March 2023; Published date: 22 March 2023

Citation: Saeed Shoja Shafti, MD, (2023), Machiavellianism: a Critical Appraisal, *Clinical Research and Clinical Trials*; 7(3): DOI:10.31579/2693-4779/126

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Abstract:

Machiavellianism is known as a character trait that involves deceit, manipulateness, and an unemotional, devious, pessimistic view of others. Machiavelli uses people for personal advantage, and doesn't care about the outcomes of his or her behavior. So, rationalization of abuse, misjudgment and heartless victimization of persons, constitute the main framework for Machiavellianism, which is applied over and over again by exploiters. From a criminological standpoint, a Machiavelli can be a lawbreaker if he or she causes swindling, harm or losses to petitioners or robbed sufferers. Disregard to forensic aspects, Machiavellianism is socially, culturally, academically and pedagogically a taboo which is not overtly recommendable or supportable. But, indeed, it seems that such an abominable act, though it is disapproved, is not absolutely prohibited, because it can be traced in a variety of professions or fields; a finding which is not infrequent or momentary, as well. Therefore, Machiavellianism is a multidimensional issue which deserves more than a superficial analysis or verdict. In the present article, the said awful misapplication has been discussed briefly for the acquisition of a practical conception and stance, which may perhaps be more adjustable with the prevalent state of affairs.

Keywords: machiavellianism; machiavelli; psychopathy; narcissism; dark triad; moralities; honesty; dishonesty

Introduction

Academically and ethically, the contrast between honesty and dishonesty has constantly been one of the main subjects of scholastic criticism and debate. Pedagogically, dishonesty is immoral conduct which needs reproach and rectification. Spiritualism, as well, declares deceitfulness, lying and duplicity as sinful doings which deserve chastisement and asking God for forgiveness. Socially, a person is known as an unsafe individual, who should be avoided without question. Culturally, deceit is equal to treachery, which is obnoxious and ominous. Accordingly, typically and idealistically, no reasonable philosophy has ever recommended Machiavellianism, which is generally defined as validation of mistreatment in support of personal purpose, as an acceptable or humanistic approach or manner. But, in point of fact, observations do not match with manifest teachings or preaching. So, in the present article, the said critical theme has been analyzed realistically, not idealistically, to examine its multiple aspects and possible utilities.

Background:

Machiavellianism is a political principle supporting the doctrines of governmental hegemony that has been analyzed in Machiavelli's writings, in which political necessities is placed above morals, and deceit and craft are used to maintain power and fulfill the plans of a leader. So, such conduct is characterized by unscrupulous or subtle dishonesty, expediency, cunning, or deception [1]. In the 16th century, political philosopher and adviser, Niccoló Machiavelli, wrote "The Prince," a platform which highlighted trickery as being more essential to political affairs than ethics, and as stated by him, "It

is more important to be feared than loved." From there, the word "Machiavelli" was born, which refers to anyone who is scheming or immoral. In 1970, psychologists Richard Christie and Florence Geiss acknowledged Machiavellianism as a character trait that involves deceit, manipulateness, and an unemotional, devious, pessimistic view of others. Moreover, they use people for their advantage, and don't care about the outcomes of their behavior. Unlike a narcissist who will demand others' attention or a psychopath who might get violent, a Machiavelli might be a little more introvert and spend his or her time on conspiracy instead of acting out [2, 3]. But Machiavellianism wasn't a psychological term until the said psychologists developed the "Machiavellianism Scale". As a personality inventory that is still used as the main evaluation instrument, this scale is currently termed "the Mach-IV test". The "Machiavellianism Scale" is a score of up to 100 resulting from a test that involves a series of queries. Persons who score above 60 are considered 'high Machs', and those scoring lower than 60, 'low Machs'. Moreover, there is a 'Kiddie Mach Test' for youngsters. On the other hand, psychopathy and narcissism are recognized as further psychological conditions that are associated with Machiavellianism, which, together, constitute the 'Dark Triad'. Hence, personality disorders which might have the traits of Machiavellianism include narcissistic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder [4]. Accordingly, some psychologists consider Machiavellianism as a subclinical form of psychopathy, since they both share manipulative tendencies and unsympathetic heartlessness as their primary qualities [5]. Similarly, in the pursuit of their purposes, persons high in Machiavellianism

don't hesitate to hurt others if they think it would be advantageous [6]. Psychopathy differs from Machiavellianism only in impulsivity, a lack of long-term planning and self-control, as psychopaths tend to be reckless [7]. Also, positive associations between Machiavellianism and both primary and secondary psychopathy were found [8]. Likewise, consistent with the results of a study, Machiavellianism scores were clearly linked with aspects of narcissism that indicate maladjustment, namely, entitlement and exploitativeness, and inversely related with adaptive narcissistic inclinations, namely, self-sufficiency [9 -12].

On the other hand, because of their skill at interpersonal manipulation, there has often been an assumption that persons with 'high Machs' have more intellect, or capacity to understand other persons in social circumstances, though some research has denied any connection between Machiavellianism and IQ [13]. Furthermore, findings of another study have shown some associations between Machiavellianism and low levels of empathy, "mind-reading skills" or Theory of mind (ToM) (namely, they can easily read the minds of others and understand social situations, which they can successfully manipulate in the service of their own intrinsic motivations), and high levels of anhedonia, alexithymia, anxiety, and depression [14,15]. Thus, alexithymia, which is the lack of awareness of feelings, including one's own feelings and the feelings of others, is considered an important trait that is linked with Machiavellianism. Therefore, alexithymics can't recognize feelings or describe them, which may lead to problems regarding understanding one's own emotional state, in addition to failure in realizing what the feelings of other people are [16]. Besides, a number of studies have connected Machiavellianism with interpersonal problems, aggression and ambivalence [17]. Also, Machiavellian people display an avoidance attachment style in their general interpersonal relationships, although avoidance is further accompanied by some features of attachment anxiety in their intimate-close relationships. Machiavellian persons not only have a negative representation of significant others, but they also tend to seek reciprocal closeness in order to abuse their companions. This ambivalence in distance regulation might be primarily important in realizing the vulnerability of Machiavellian people [18]. Finally, research has revealed that impairment in prefrontal inhibitory functions may result in the expression of "Machiavellian" personality traits, and the frontal lobes are required for maintenance of pro-social personality traits [19].

Discussion:

Manipulative tactics of social behavior (Machiavellianism) have been studied by both evolutionary biologists and psychologists to evaluate the adaptive advantages of manipulative social behavior. On the other hand, Machiavellianism does not constantly lead to real-life victory and does not correlate in a straight line with general intelligence. Hence, it is best considered as one of several social strategies which are successful in some situations but not others. As a general rule, human evolutionary psychology may provide valuable contexts for thinking about behavioral strategies, such as Machiavellianism, and identify a large number of explicit theories that have not yet been evaluated by social psychologists [20]. Throughout history, the white lie has been acknowledged as an acceptable tactic, if the related conditions could justify that. Such a fib, which is illimitable and seemingly well-intentioned, is usually applicable in family atmospheres. Likewise, according to some believers, prevarication and hiding one's religion or opinions, as well, is comparable to fibs and are okay in particular situations. So while, intellectually, dishonesty is not acceptable, realistically and in specific conditions, it is quite bearable. Moral principles, ethics, consciences and other comparable concepts, which together denote honesty and morality, are usually among the first doctrines that are being discussed in various fields or cults, and are routinely announced as a necessary prerequisite in various careers and social interactions. In fact, without morals, in general, no family, as the basic unit of any community, and no social group or civilization could ever survive. Therefore, ethics have been evolved parallel to biological and intellectual development to serve cohesion,

humanity, and existence. So, it was one of the most valuable outcomes of natural selection, in addition to other achievements or abilities. On the other hand, untruthfulness is ordinarily declared as the character of felons and evil groups. As a result, the righteousness or deceitfulness of any person or assembly may be formulated, pragmatically, with regard to their frankness or falsehood, which is observable and may be considered as their regular guideline or doctrine. But, is such a division exact? Can we typify persons or groups based on their plain conduct or avows? Is such a categorization valid regarding us, as well? Briefly, "The personal aim justifies the immoral tactic" is the most famous passage that is commonly being ascribed to Niccoló Machiavelli, though his focus was essentially on political affairs, not ordinary life or livelihood. Anyhow, many folks, like educationalists, mental health counselors, spiritualists, sociologists, politicians or even lay people, usually express the said clause as an unacceptable motto that negates honesty, which has been requested constantly by cultural values or divine advice. Psychoanalytically, while the worthy aspirations drive from the living instinct, the evil desires drive from the death instinct. Likewise, while the primary process thinking (illogical and fantasy thinking in the course of daydreaming) is rooted in the unconscious mental activity, the secondary process thinking (rational and goal-directed thinking throughout ordinary life) results from conscious mental action. Similarly, while Id is the icon of repressed wishes and Ego is the emblem of an evolutionary compromise between inner life and outer surroundings, Super-ego is the symbol of superintendent supremacy that originates from earlier training and a copying of close relatives' thoughts and conduct, which may be summarized in conscience or sense of right and wrong. Also, a character is constituted from a mixture of the said fragments, with dimensions that are not alike in everyone. For example, the feeble super-ego in psychopaths can be contrasted with the harsh super-ego in anankastic persons. So, there are various personalities with different physiognomies, which differentiate people from each other. Nonetheless, it doesn't mean that there are no shared elements among all humans. From a phenomenological perspective, as well, the difference between characters depends on different proportion of constituting characters, like schizotypal, schizoid, paranoid, narcissistic, histrionic, sociopathic, borderline, avoidant, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, passive-aggressive, sadistic, masochistic, and depressive traits [21]. Similarly and from a psychobiologic perspective, different temperament dimensions, like harm avoidance, novelty seeking, reward dependence and persistence, which are now understood to be genetically independent dimensions that occur in all possible combinations within the same individual rather than as mutually exclusive categories, constitute the body's biases in the modulation of conditioned behavioral responses to prescriptive physical stimuli, and reveal the stylistic component ("how") of behavior, as differentiated from the motivation ("why") and the content ("what") of behavior [22]. Besides, often the most diagnosable personality disorder in clinics is the undifferentiated type [23]. So, once more, every character is constituted from an assortment of conscious and unconscious mental activities, traits, and temperaments. Such an assortment has a direct influence on personal insight and social judgment, which may fill the gap between known rightness and wrongness. Though such a formulation may represent determinism in the formation of character, which may challenge exaggerated blame and reproach against wrongdoings, punishment may be justified as a conditioning tool, as well. All these psychological processes are disregard to cultural, historical, economic or political determinants. Based on the aforesaid contributing factors, stressing that everybody should behave at all times honestly and properly is an unreal expectation. On the other hand, honesty demands a double-sided pledge between individual and family, kinfolk and community, people and system, if, idyllically, it is expected to be factual and constant. But, again, the said request is not at all times achievable because the related intervening factors are not persistently controllable. For example, in political affairs, Machiavellianism is commonly part of the game, without which no advantage is generally feasible. Accordingly, an honest politician can be nothing more than a permanent underdog, if he or she is not acquainted with manipulative

maneuvers during dealings with politically aware challengers. Likewise, duping enemies during wars, some of the commercial rivalries and espionage operations, cannot be done without manipulation and deception; if not, no success can be guaranteed, at least for them [24,25]. Competition is a common phenomenon, which may involve, reflexively, numerous challenges and antipathies. Every rivalry ordinarily has a winner and a loser. While for the conqueror, the success may mean more progress, for the loser the loss may be equal to total destruction. So, when a competition, whether economic, political or military, is a struggle for survival, merciless strategy can be a preferred method for further rivalry, which will enforce itself, compulsorily and inescapably, in the challengers' mindsets. Helplessness, hopelessness, mental stress, occupational pressure, economic strain, poverty, shortage of time, lack of chance, narrow choice, limited alternative, personal intolerance, attention deficit, jealousy, disability, social mayhem, corrupted system, and negligent officials may turn Machiavellianism into a public policy, instead of an exceptional alternative. Anyhow, it is not deniable that deceit is, also, a derivative of evolution for self-protection, gaining extra benefits, finding more resources or better mates, though in an unfair and egotistical style. Due to instinctive narcissism, it is expectable that the number of selfish people is usually more than the quantity of selfless persons, who do big jobs, anonymously, and get fewer benefits, graciously. On the other hand, narcissism, as a stipulation for survival of an organism, demands conditions which are not easily obtainable. While Machiavellianism may be the outcome of a contrast between assets and deficits, many schemers were not naturally manipulators and there was a turning point in their lives, which forced them to become Machiavelli. Such dynamism is different from Machiavellianism, which is derived from insatiable greediness and may denote a personal malady. Moreover, untruthfulness, which is on behalf of national security or social welfare, is different from dishonesty, which is for self-interested benefits. So, Machiavellianism may have both positive and negative aspects, based on the primary intentions and final outcomes. Though, historically and evolutionary, moral code assisted the existence of civilization, it was not at all times enough for its sheltering, and demanded a mixture of honesty and dishonesty to guarantee better protection. Enemies prefer honest, but oblivious, nemeses. Sometimes, in surroundings full of rivalry, antagonism and conflict, a hoax is the only solution for persistence or victory. International political affairs and worldwide economics contain countless tricks, along with reciprocal nondiscriminatory interactions. On the other hand, political Machiavellianism is not dependent of the form of system, and can be applied by every regime, based on the domestic requirements, foes' circumstances, or inland hegemonic desires. Therefore, while, concretely, deceitfulness is a disparaging subject, from an abstract viewpoint, it demands a wide-ranging dialectical analysis. Despite the fact that, on a national scale, political affairs and money matters demand smartness, which is not exactly equivalent to honesty, on an international scale, many times, they demand dishonesty against the contestants. Gaining limited or unique resources demands application of a mixture of truthful and untruthful maneuvers, a process which has been performed throughout history and will be performed endlessly. As is usual, no politician is measured for evaluation of moral physiognomies till expose of some adverse proof, purposely or accidentally, by opponents, representatives or law enforcement agencies. Undiscovered scandals, too, will permit incessant shielding of double-dealings by ostensible statements or mannerisms. This is a condition that doesn't have any crucial way out, because even the honest politicians may be the nominee, representative or supporter of a large number of insincere individuals and officials. On the other hand, politics involves limitless fights for gaining power and hegemony, and politicians are the actors of such a play, which is innately antagonistic, merciless, and endless. Such a composition demands fearless and determined individuals, not sissy folks. Accordingly, it seems that finding a bit of wrongdoing in the personal history of courageous people should not be astonishing. Anyhow, though Machiavellianism is in fact an ancient and regular practice in some occupations or accomplishments, and is as old as the creation of human beings, and can be explained as a byproduct

of evolution, it is not ethically acceptable, or tactically recommendable, because its explicit validation contravenes civil rights, endanger public safety, and breaks social values. Humanity, civilization and the world cannot survive by means of Machiavellianism, as a general philosophical outlook. So, it remains everlastingly an underground approach for a limited, but not immaterial, group of civilians or officials. Nationally or locally, rule of law, rightful administration and democracy seem to be effective approaches for the management of Machiavellianism, which is not thoroughly eradicable, or smoothly modifiable.

Conclusion:

Though, academically, Machiavellianism is a reproachable tendency, pragmatically, it is a maneuver which is employed repeatedly, unavoidably and knowledgeable by some professions. Besides, peripheral stresses or inner shortages may increase its frequency. Anyhow, it is a kind of problem-solving strategy, which may be justifiable if it pertains to national security or social welfare; otherwise, if it is an egotistical deed, then it is a criminal act. But such a judgment could be right on a national scale, while with respect to international businesses and struggles, no comparable rationalization are conceivable. Though there are a lot of international decrees and organizations that may monitor or regulate transnational communications, there are many intervening factors, as well, that may disturb fairness, mask untruthfulness, and delude the masses. So, it is a multidimensional item that cannot be analyzed superficially. Hoax, whether prohibited or justified, covert or disguised, mandatory or unneeded, is an interminable approach and morality, whether genuinely or intellectually, is a dynamism that may impact it provisionally, but not principally. Law, also, as the catalyst of the said conflict, stands in the middle of the game.

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DOI:10.31579/2693-4779/126

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