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The Concept of Generosity

The definition of the concept of generosity demands resolution of many questionable issues. Nicolo Machiavelli and Martin Luther both try to consider the essence of generosity, identifying people's intents and purposes, as well as providing account of consequences of giving to other people. The philosophers view the concept from different perspectives. Luther considers generosity a major service to God and the response to divine generosity. He points out the necessity to give out of free will not expecting anything in return. Such giving is meant to please God, while giving out of vanity or selfishness can, on the contrary, anger Him. Machiavelli, in his turn, puts reputation gained among people, reaching power and accomplishment of great deeds, and not God's intent, in the center of his measurements. Though the views of Luther and Machiavelli are fundamentally different, there are some similarities between their ideas, too.

Luther's Views on Generosity

Christian love, which helps and serves the needy, is considered by Luther to be the greatest service of God that will be judged and testified at the Last Day. Moreover, the poor may be those who lack a range of resources, money being just one of them. The most important principle is that the giver should not seek any benefit, worldly or heavenly (qtd. in Schervish and Whitaker 122).

To understand the concept of giving as viewed by Martin Luther, it is important to understand how he perceived the central giving, that it the gifts granted to all people by God. God, according to Luther is gracious and generous and gives everything to people, who deserve

nothing. Pointing out the generosity of God, Luther states that all people should strive for generosity to pay Him what we owe to Him. Therefore, giving to the community and caring for it is a response to God's generosity, which is free and exercised out of free will. This way, people have to serve fellow human beings willingly by whatever means they can to pay their debt to everyone. Though, such righteousness cannot stem from people's nature or their own powers, as this is God who gives righteousness and makes us fulfil our obligations. "Therefore, all that is done apart of faith, or in unbelief, is false; it is hypocrisy and sin, no matter how good a showing it makes" (Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans).

It is also important, that the act accomplished under compulsion or necessity is not pleasing the God. Thus, without right will and motive, generosity is not virtuous. This way, men giving to church or donating to services or establishments to satisfy their vanity or for the sake of glory, do not do any virtuous thing (Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans).

Considering the giver, Luther suggests that a person is not obliged to give a loan except out of his surplus or something, which he can spare from his own needs. First and greatest obligation, according to Luther, is to provide for the needs of one's own family and servants, and the person should not divert from them what he owes them. Moreover, the giver must be ready to take the risk of losing what he lends. Luther suggests that the belief that the one is not obliged to give to the needy unless there is an *extreme need*, that is when the needy is dying of hunger, freezing to death, or is ruined by poverty and debts is a way to avoid Cristian duties. Everyone should remember to do everyone what they want to be done to them (qtd. in Schervish and Whitaker 121-122).

Considering these principles, Luther suggests the following rules have to govern the act of giving. First of all, people do not have to give to friends and powerful only. Most importantly, people should give to everyone, including the poor and one's enemies, as the God teaches us to be good to everyone, not just to those who are good to us, but also to those who

harm us or cannot give anything in return. He also stipulates that lending has to be done without selfishness and self-seeking (qtd. in Schervish and Whitaker 122).

To understand the concept of generosity as seen by Luther, it is also important to take account of the practice of giving and buying indulgences, which Luther strongly opposed. Indulgence, as a way to reduce the punishment a sinner has to undergo, was also an act of generosity, as they were occasionally granted to people for visiting holy places or particular churches or issued out of Pope's generosity. It also happened that wealthy people perceived it as an act of generosity to buy the indulgence for their deceased friend or relative to reduce the time he had to spend in Purgatory. Luther questions the virtuousness of such generosity in his *Theses*.

Luther claims that the Pope can forgive sins only in the way, that he explains to people and confirms what may be forgiven by God (Thesis 6). He states that prime motive for doing good is helping the souls for the sake of most holy love and due to the better distress these souls suffer. Therefore, Luther questions why the Pope does not get all the souls out of Purgatory from this motive, but saves some of them for such a miserable thing as money, which will be spent on St. Peter's Minister (Thesis 82). He questions the holiness of the Pope, who permit the wicked enemies of God to save a devout soul for the sake of money, while not saving it without any payment, out of love and compassion (Thesis 84).

Luther also considers the charity as an act of generosity. He teaches, that those giving to the poor and lending to needy do a good thing. Moreover it is better than buying indulgence. It is also important that by exercising generosity the men grows better, while the indulgence does not make him better, only frees him from punishment. Moreover, those Christians who see their neighbor's distress, but buy indulgence instead of helping him, arouse the anger of God. Though Luther considers buying indulgence in the first place, some conclusions can be drawn on generosity in general, too, as he teaches that people's prime duty, unless they are rich

enough, is to keep what is necessary for the use of their households (Thesis 43-46). Luther states that it is important for the Pope to generously donate to the St. Peter's Minister out of his own money rather than extorting money of poor Christians (Thesis 51, 86).

Machiavelli's Views on Generosity

Machiavelli is notable for writing about things as they are in reality, rather than dreaming up republics and kingdoms that never existed (Spencer). Taking account of the difference between the general understanding of how one should act and what people actually do, Machiavelli stipulates that some virtuous acts can ruin the prince, while some vices may make him prosper. Therefore, a person should be cautious about the acts, which seem virtuous, and know when to act against public morals (Machiavelli 71-73).

Therefore, the philosopher's views on the virtues, and generosity in particular, are affected by the actual practices and examples from the history. Machiavelli sees an immediate difference between true generosity and an image of being generous. He gives due respect to the virtue of generosity (liberality), writing that "it would be well to be reputed liberal" (74), but he also states that honest generosity will be exercised in the way that will not let it be known, which, therefore, is of no purpose to the prince.

Machiavelli suggests that the prince can be generous with the purpose of gaining a reputation of generosity, which, nevertheless is a wrong practice, which will eventually ruin him. This is because to be reputed generous, the prince will have to consume his property. When it depletes, he will be forced to tax his people and do anything else he can to maintain the reputation of being liberal. Eventually, the prince will recognize that such acts put him in danger and would like to draw back from it, gaining despise from his subordinates (Machiavelli 74). Therefore, being despised and hated is the consequence of liberality, the ruler should guard himself against (Machiavelli 76).

Thus, the ruler does not have to be afraid of having the reputation of being mean. In the course of time, his people will see that his economy let him defend himself against aggression and engage in enterprises without unduly taxing his people. This way, he will exercise liberality to a greater number of people than if he was generous to some of them (Machiavelli 75).

Machiavelli states that the great things people have observed were accomplished by those who were reputed mean, while others failed, therefore being mean is the vice enabling the one to govern. The examples proving this idea are Pope Julius the Second and the king of Spain. Machiavelli also considers the example of Caesar, who was notable for coming to power by virtue of generosity. The philosopher suggests that if Caesar had not been killed, he would have been obliged to moderate his spending to maintain his rule. In relation to the example of Caesar, Machiavelli states that there are actually two ways of generosity: to spend what is yours and your subjects' or to spend something, which belong to someone else. Therefore, while the first can ruin the prince, the second adds up to the reputation and should never be neglected. (Machiavelli 76).

Analysis of Similarities between the Ideas of Luther and Machiavelli

Though the views of Luther and Machiavelli are fundamentally different, as the philosophers view the concept from different perspectives, there seem to be some similarities between their views on generosity. First, it is important to note, that Machiavelli does not deny virtuousness of generosity as such. Moreover, his view agrees with the teaching of Luther in the way that they both emphasize that true generosity is the one exercised discretely, and not for appraisal or benefit (Machiavelli 74; Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans). The difference is that Machiavelli considers generosity in terms of gaining and maintaining power. For this purpose true discrete generosity is vain, as it does not add to the image of being generous. While Luther considers it in terms of following the teaching of God and thus reaching

the Heaven, for which true generosity is vital. The image of being generous, not backed by faith and Cristian love, is, on the contrary, corrupting a soul and angering God (Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans).

Though doing it in different manners, the both philosophers reveal the hypocrisy of generosity exerted by the powerful people. Machiavelly openly considers such acts of the wealthy people a strategy to reach and maintain power, which, nevertheless, is sure to be not successful. While Luther points out the hypocrisy of the Pope, who encourages poor people to generously donate to the construction of beautiful cathedrals, while reserving his own treasures. Another example is that the Pope is ready to save the souls from Purgatory for money, but is not doing so out of his free will and compassion, which would be a good example of true generosity.

The both philosophers, thus, also come to consider the practice of being generous at someone else's expense. Moreover, the philosophers agree to the point that it is wrong for the ruler to use his subjects' assets to seem generous. Machiavelly states generosity is bad for the ruler, as at some point he will have to burden his subjects with taxes to be reputed generous (Machiavelli 75). Luther opposes the Pope for the same reasons, as he points out it is wrong that the Pope extorts money for indulgencies from the poor ascribing the generosity of an act of forgiving the sins to himself, while this is only God who can do this (The Ninety-Five Thesis).

To conclude, Machiavelli and Luther both point out differences between true generosity and the one aimed at gaining particular reputation and self-indulgence. The philosophers agree that it is wrong to exercise generousness using someone else's resources.

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