Machiavelli's And Lao Tzu's Views On Human Nature: A Comparative Analysis

Human nature is the ability to naturally feel, think, and act. In Lao-Tzu's "Thoughts from the Tao-te Ching" he brings an insight on every one of us explaining that we have a choice to practice self-awareness and exercise our own power in and over the world. His view is similar to the essay "The Qualities of a Prince", by Niccolo Machiavelli. Yet, Machiavelli has a very dehumanizing viewpoint and believes that every human is selfish, deceitful, and untrustworthy. Machiavelli and Lao-Tzu provide a different view of humanity in their essays, yet similar. Machiavelli felt morality was not necessary but stood in the way of an efficient government. Lao-Tzu believes that human nature's tendencies towards immorality get in the way of true happiness and you should overcome these to become truly powerful and a better person. They both believed that human nature got in the way when trying to be a good person and it should never let it get in the way of being a great ruler.

Machiavelli lived during a time of political turmoil. While Lao-Tzu lived a quite stable and peaceful life while working in the court of the ruling dynasty. The way people grow up can affect their beliefs. Such as most people's political views are what their parents believe because they grew up hearing it. Since living in these conditions it affected his views on how a prince should be as a ruler and how he views all people in general. Yet, he believes that human nature is insignificant when being a prince. He believes that every ruler should see that they have flaws, but never show them. Machiavelli says that it is impossible to have a prince whom has every good quality "because human nature does not permit it". He proclaims that even though the prince may not have all great qualities, they need to overcome the bad reputation that would come with it. It is more important what people think of you and your reputation, than what you think of yourself. He believes the prince must learn from his weaknesses and keep on going. He asserts that these weaknesses are lessons to be taught to a prince because a great prince would be someone who sees they have vulnerability and work to make himself better. No one is perfect, but you have to move past it and show what your great at being in order to be a good prince.

Even though morality is not as significant to Machiavelli he believes other things are more important when being a prince. Machiavelli talks about the concept of how it is better to be feared than loved "love is held together by a chain of obligation… fear is held together by a dread of punishment which will never abandon you". He believes that when you are loved it only makes you more greedy and weak. When you are feared you have more power, authority and confidence. However, it is not the type of fear that will be hated, but it is the type that will be respected. Machiavelli also expresses how it is hard to be a prince when people have different opinions from being in a situation where you get the advantage or the disadvantage. Machiavelli knew that "generosity used in such a manner as to give you reputation for it will harm you". The prince should do what he believes will help most people even if he knows there will be some hatred in the end from it. As a prince, there is no way around being condemned by many. However it is your choice to either weak, offended by everything, and change the way you rule, or be strong, stand up for yourself, and know you are doing a good job for the people.

Lao Tzu believed that human nature got in the way of being a good person. Lao Tzu sees

humans for who they are, such as selfish and materialistic. In comparison to Machiavelli, he brings more hope. Lao Tzu talks about the three things he hopes to teach within his essay which are simplicity, patience, and compassion. If everyone expressed these qualities you can be a better people not only within yourself, but for others. Lao Tzu wants his readers to realize that there is hope to have peace among the world without war and our egoistic personalities overcoming ourselves. Even though it is impractical, Lao Tzu believes that you can overcome human nature. In order to gain true happiness, you must free yourself from the bad, but human nature gets in the way. We are naturally selfish, because it gives us a false sense of power.

Since Lao Tzu feels morality is important, he brings a more unrealistic view. Lao Tzu brings hope for people and says what people want to hear. He brings a more biblical tone to his essay which made it mostly sound imaginary. His essay is written like poetry and most of it is hard to understand with so many metaphors and similes. While Machiavelli is more clear on what exactly to do to be a good prince, like a manual on how to be a good prince. Lao Tzu believes that war is unnecessary. “How could he rejoice in victory and delight in the slaughter of men?” He thinks that it is unnatural and inhumane for people to fight and kill each other. Peace is not made when you have done this. Lao Tzu does not understand how someone could rejoice when they have killed several lives. Lives that could have had a home, a family, a dream. This can be made unrealistic because there is no way to end war. It is the only way to get what we want, which also adds to our selfish characteristics in human nature. Additionally, Lao Tzu also talks about desire in his essay. “When there is no desire, all things are at peace.” This can be made impractical considering we will always have a desire in something. Throughout life we live on motivation and goals which is desire. Morality is something that people wish they have, but do not have these qualities because they are mostly selfish in most decisions. Selfishness can affect your ability to have morality towards decision making.

The two philosophies differ, but one is more realistic than the other. Machiavelli’s view of people is more realistic than Lao-Tzu because he shows us an improbable view of human nature. His is a kind of yen and yang point of view that every good action has an opposite action; Machiavelli, on the other hand is straight to the point, that a ruler should have a strong hand without causing his people to hate him, he must “desire to be considered merciful and not cruel; nevertheless, he must take care not to misuse this mercy.” Both agree that human nature is good and bad, and that if not controlled, chaos will erupt. The biggest difference is that Machiavelli believes that the ruler must have complete control because humans can’t make good decisions on their own while Lao-Tzu believes that no one can have complete control and that everything must run its course.