

“Plato & Machiavelli - State & Power”

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Introduction

Plato and Machiavelli are two astounding Political thinkers whose thinking is at the two opposite poles of a magnet.

The political philosophy of Plato was to guide the state to achieve greatness and this would be under the leadership of a just ruler who would understand the affairs of the state make it into a place where people would desire to live in. Plato begins his book, ‘The Republic’ defining the meaning of justice to describe what should exactly be an idealistic society, state and ruler.

Machiavelli’s political philosophy is considered modern and mainly focuses on how administration and power have transgressed in real political circumstances. The situations in which political institutions run have been described by him under realistic situations.

Plato was inspired by the teachings of Socrates which required a man to know to be entitled to rule. An objective study can be done which aims to establish a good life for man along with the study of the state. Such study must be attained intelligently. To know this the knowledge of ‘real’ and ‘forms’ is necessary. Such just and good status in the status and man can only be brought by the philosopher-king. For Plato thorough knowledge gives the ruler a right to his position (Behzadi, 1977).

Early Life of Plato

Before we get into the depth of the political philosophy of these renowned political thinkers, we must first understand the background and their early life. Western administration began in ancient Greece in the year 400 B.C. The administrative system began in the city-state and then went on to be a stable system from there onwards. Ancient Greek states of Sparta, Thebes and Athens had a deep and mature relationship with their citizens. Such was the status of the relationship that it was unthinkable to separate the State and the individual (Takala, 1998).

Plato came from a wealthy family which was part of the Athenian royal community. After the demise of his father, his mother married a friend of the prominent statesman, Pericles. This gave him a platform where he could himself be part of the political life of Athens and establish a career in politics (Murphy, 2015). His ambition of taking part in politics couldn’t come to fruition because of the conditions prevalent at that time. The Peloponnesian war was very cruel and violent and affected him as he never got a chance to take part in daily politics (Takala, 1998, p. 788).

He was disturbed to a large extent due to the events which took place during his life. The loss of Athens against Sparta and the punishment on his teacher Socrates which eventually led him to his made it clear that the only way out of this mess was to have a state being led by a philosopher-king. He had hatred against the rule of the majority and for democracy because of what he saw that his master was killed. He left Athens to travel to Italy, Egypt and Greece and upon returning in 386 B.C he set up his academy which is one of the first University-based centres of learning in the ancient world (Chander & Grover, 2014).

To organize life in the state a political order which was systematic was proposed by him. The main purpose of the ideal state was to make people good.

Early Life of Machiavelli

Few things are known about the early life of Niccolo Machiavelli. Born in the year 1469 in Florence, Italy Machiavelli came from a family which was struggling to keep itself in the upper class of Italy and it was his father who as a lawyer made the efforts to deal with this problem. At the young age of 29, he entered into Italian politics and it was at that time in the year 1498 he became the secretary to the Second Chancery and he went on to hold this office for fourteen years. His dedicated duty made him a trusted individual on whom administrative responsibilities could be entrusted. In the fullness of time, he got elevated and was dispatched to 24 diplomatic missions. During these missions, he made visits to prominent city-states and courts which were out of Italy. The way he understood the diplomatic intricate affairs and realities were shown in the observations which he made in his reports. These reports are studied even in the modern world to get a grasp of Machiavelli's astute observations (Misra, 1952, p. 18).

Diplomatic missions undertaken by Machiavelli were at the behest of Pier Soderni who served as the chief magistrate of the republic. Due to unfortunate instances and lack of decision-making ability of Soderni the Medici were able to get back in power in Florence in the year 1512. The Medici were supported by the English, Swiss and Spanish. Machiavelli's political persecution began and he was subject to arrest and torture. Eventually, he was exiled to Tuscany and it was during that period that he wrote 'The Prince' and 'The Discourses' (Bellioti, 1978).

Plato's Understanding of the State

For Plato every person doing his job was justice. But in the ancient world, a person's profession was that which was done by their father and this continued for many generations. In the ideal state of Plato, there is no father legally but a person's job must be decided by tests which decide his aptitude or by the understanding of the state. Plato thus justifies the state's duty of determining a man's job because the supreme goal of the state could be achieved.

Greece was a region where the primary political system was based on democracy. Athens was a leading polis when compared to the other city-states. He was not in the favour of

democracy and wanted the aristocrats to rule as he believed that if the demos have too much power, then that might be a catastrophe to all sections of the society. For him, the death of Socrates turned his opinion against democracy into a much bitter form of administration. This life-changing event started his literary journey. His most remarkable works are *Polis* (The Republic) which is his most celebrated work, *Nomoi* (Laws) and *Politikos* (Statesman) (Takala, 1998, p. 788).

Plato wanted his ideal state to be divided into three classes which were comprised of the rulers, the ones who provided auxiliary services and the economic classes. All these classes were the foundation stone of the state which he wants to establish. Plato's ideal state is to be ruled by the guardians. The individual who has virtue for theoretical matters compares to be the one who knows the art of ruling. It is to be noted that the skill of knowing is different from that of the ruling. The ruling class and the auxiliary are the ones who command control of the affairs of the state. Rulers need to make good rules and that is their primary duty. But he doesn't need to be the best to execute them as he is dependent on the auxiliary class for implementing them. This combination forms the perfect state. Restraint on doing what he does know won't come into the picture at all. He can take decisions overriding the judicial and the legal systems as and when he feels it is necessary. This state is governed by the unmatched wisdom of the ruler. The auxiliary class carries out the orders of the ruler and the economic classes have to obey these orders without asking any questions. The relationship between all three classes is a harmonious one in Plato's State.

Each of these classes is accorded a metal and this acts as a sub-theme while the main theme is the ideal state. These sub-themes are the ones that aid and maintain the main theme. Gold is the metal that is designated to the ruler class, silver is given to the auxiliary class and the other workers and farmers are given bronze. Depending on the classification of economic life further division can be done. Iron is given to the ones who produce the essential goods and bronze to the ones who produce the unessential. The unessential items include luxuries too. Metal here symbolizes the soul of the individual. Metals aren't supposed to be mixed so that each class stays true to its kind. Specialization is required to keep the class structure of the city-state.

To have the best possible population in the state Plato wants each class to breed amongst itself only. For example, men and women who are of the gold class i.e., rulers. Those who are of the lower order must find a way to get themselves promoted. The system mentioned here doesn't denote caste-based discrimination. Plato wants those of the lower metals to use education to progress and upgrade (Martin, 1981).

The main motive of Plato is to give more power to the guardian class. This will increase the necessity to have more individuals of the auxiliary class. To have power in the state it is not necessary to just have great military facilities. Stable power in the state is only achieved when the leader has metaphysical capabilities and Plato's choice of leader is such otherworldly

beings. The education system which Plato has designed separates the rulers and those who are ruled. The leaders have mystical skills.

His Ideal State doesn't have any provisions to give schooling to all citizens but it is restricted to just the classes who are in the upper hierarchy of the society. Plato wants the auxiliary class to train and be like dogs who are loyal to their masters and fierce towards strangers. The auxiliary class is unique as they can succeed in the hierarchy and command the ruler's position. But just education is not sufficient as a temptation to earthly desires might restrict the person from becoming a philosopher. What makes a true philosopher-king is the way of life he leads and his life sets the path on which the state has to lead (Takala, 1998, p. 789).

The Philosopher-King & His Duty

According to Plato his ideal model of the State is unique and that there can just be one model which needs to be implemented. The existing states were more or less useless and the leaders they had were those who didn't deserve to be in power. As per Plato philosophers are those who know the right thing for the State and who wanted to act in a manner so that the knowledge which they have is utilized properly. A non-philosophical man for Plato had an opinion or belief which was good and this made such men the ones who knew and not the belief.

When it came to the administrators who were present in his time, he was in a sense of discontent with them as they did not have wisdom when it came to establishing the path for the state nor they were individuals who would do good by being virtuously strong. The only thing which mattered to them was their loss and gain. In the way a doctor uses his skill and knowledge to help patients recover, a good leader would also use his understanding to help the state flourish.

To help the state, prosper Plato wants the Philosopher-King to focus on education of the different classes in his state. To protect the interests of the state, Plato doesn't mind even if the ruler needs to tell lies. He cautions that such behaviour should only apply to the one who heads the state. An Ideal State in his vision needed to have 'Virtues' which are courage, prudence, temperance and justice. The best and the highest ability concerning the matters of administration is prudence. It is considered to be a virtue of paramount objective and not just a skill or ability which needs technical jurisprudence. Rulers who have prudence give stability to the state. It is such a form that is a unique gift to the ruler. Disaster on the State can be avoided only when the philosophers become rulers or the existing rulers become philosophers. Individuals who rule must be the ones who seek the truth and avoid a path where they would be greed for power.

Political power and prudence are difficult to connect because even people tend not to accept philosophers because of their blindness in recognizing true talent. Only a few recognize philosophers and the rest try to dissimulate. (Takala, 1998, p. 792).

Who is the Philosopher-King and what makes him one?

An individual who goes through an intensive education which consists of arithmetic, astronomy, mathematics, harmonics and also knowledge of dialectics. Knowledge of all these fields entitles the philosopher-king to rule without any restrictions and hurdles. This should be applied in each society. True statesmanship and the art of governing are based on this principle.

A unique feature of Plato's most beloved ruler is that he has no legal force or law which limits his actions. The opinion of the masses is also limited when it comes to what they think of the ruler. Basically, in his theory of the state, the Philosopher-King is above the law. When the Philosopher King endures training of the highest possible academic levels doesn't need consent and opinion to govern as he is on a pedestal higher than that of the laymen. He didn't want to bind the Philosopher-King with the law as that would bring constraints upon their ability to rule and if such binding is done it would be like forcing a person who practices medicine to prescribe his patients from the medical handbooks (Behzadi, 1977).

Machiavelli and his Concept of State

Machiavelli lived at a time when the political system of Europe was destabilizing and the events which emerged quickly in society and state were interpreted by him logically so that the ineludible events could be predicted. Rules are needed to be evoked so that political actions can be dominated in the prevalent national conditions which took place in that period (Misra, 1952, p. 17).

Machiavelli revered the Roman Political system as well as their society. He was in the favour of absolutism and he had an affinity for leaders such as Caesar Borgia of France who was known for his political venturousness. He preferred a state which was less dependent on the opinion of the people. European rulers of the 17th century looked at him as an individual who preferred monarchy and a master state craftsman. He acknowledged the authority of the Pope and did tasks assigned to him regularly. He viewed the Church as an institution that didn't want a strong Italian State. The Church always ensured to have a divided Italian nation which was weak so that they would always be a dominant force. For Machiavelli, the elimination of the Pope's influence would pave the way for an organized Italian State. To have a strong state a well-demarcated territorial boundary, ethnic and culturally bonded people and an army that would support the resolve of the country, was to him the most needed thing. He was the building block of the idea of the nation-state and the philosophy of nationalism. In the modern era, he was the first political thinker who saw the state as an independent entity that was free from the clutches of any external force or organization. He didn't want any external authority such as a religious body to have control over people because that would undermine the state (Mathur, 1991).

In his book, 'The Discourses' he is in the favour of having a government that is republican because it is founded on just and humane theories which are political liberty, rule of law,

elections and a constitution that has a system comprising of checks and balances. In his famous literary work 'The Prince', he tends to write exactly the opposite. He chalks out a scheme in which power is acquired and kept through measures of force which is more autocratic in nature (Langton & Deitz, 1987).

Machiavelli was very smart and this can be displayed in the way he wrote 'The Prince'. In his exile, he devised ways and methods to come back to power. To please Lorenzo d' Medici this book was written in a manner that portrayed monarchy in a good light. This also would give him a chance of redemption so that he could be back in political employment.

In his sheer opinion, the fragile states of Italy were in a quagmire at the beginning of the 16th century. Facing constant invasions by barbaric people the people were subject to inhuman treatment and atrocities. The only way they could escape this was to come together as one nation-state, set aside their differences and be under the leadership of a strong man. Machiavelli knew that the way such unification could be obtained was only under a Prince. His choice of a Prince was a strong man who wouldn't hesitate in using measures that would bring in check the corruption of the people. The prince can't be a person who just uses morality. He needs to employ certain practices which can be evil but in circumstances well applicable. The Machiavellian Prince doesn't use such harsh measures for his pleasure. He uses them because of the situation in which he is in and those situations put him in a difficult position. To preserve the state, he has to take action which might be deemed immoral outside the political sphere. This comprises of the ruler choosing to be cruel over being compassionate, deceit over truthfulness and miserliness over generosity. But all this is done to protect and work in the interest of the state and not in his interest. Working for the betterment of his nation is the Machiavellian Prince's sole aim.

His Prince was subject to two separate standards. One was when he had to deal with the people of his country and the other was of dealing with foreign citizens. When the Machiavellian Prince deals with his subjects he looks at the common good while his approach in dealing with an external state is one where there is no cooperation. His aim is to have imperialism over these nations. This shows that he is more of an individual who wants to pursue his country's expansionist needs. Nationally he is seen as a firm individual who is a senior statesman. This makes him establish a state which has an order, security and stability.

Machiavelli develops this notion of virtu and the relation between the world. mental and physical skills such as fearlessness, dynamism and intellect. These qualities are essential to have personal success. The virtu which he speaks about isn't the one traditionally. His thought was that virtu remains at the same level throughout all times. The distribution of virtu was different from country to country. It was because of this reason that he believed that a country could increase its virtue only at the expense of the other and this made the world like into a gladiator's arena. He was very disturbed and unhappy when he saw the Italian States being invaded and looted by foreign powers. Thus, he had no respect for the field of

international diplomacy and arbitration. From his eyes, each nation-state was a rival and a competitor.

Machiavelli generally classified Political organizations into three different types and he got this inspiration from the political philosopher of the Roman era Polybius. The three best forms of government as per him were monarchy, democracy and aristocracy. A government can be classified into a good one only if the state has laws that are designed for advancing the common betterment and want to bring in civic virtue in the people. Checks and balances are implanted in the Machiavellian Republic which is the same as it was implemented in the Roman System. The three worst forms of governmental setup are oligarchies, anarchies and tyranny. The only way a good and a bad government can be differentiated is their choice of the common good and the way they appreciate harbouring virtue for the individuals and their state.

Machiavelli did like the republican form of government but he was convinced that the fate of his country was doomed unless an autocratic person took control and brought it under his wings. His motive wasn't just to gain power back under Medici but to have a unified Italy. Only when one strong man takes up arms and brings the country under one single umbrella then only unity can prevail in the nation-state. This would then pave the path to have a popular republic in the distant future. When wealth is equally distributed in the nation and all the citizens are in possession of civic virtue then democracy or republicanism is best suited for that nation. Aristocracy is best suited to nations that have a gifted noble class (Bellioti, 1978, p. 297).

Machiavelli was the first individual in the middle age who broke away from the hegemony of the Catholic Church. He was of the firm opinion that the state is a natural being. He never believed that the state is a divine entity and this set him apart from the previous political thinkers who thought that this was a divine order built by God. This is the reason why Machiavelli is considered to be the father of modern political thinking. His entire aim was to shift the base of political science and to subsequently liberate the country from the religious clutches (Misra, 1952, p. 26).

The Machiavellian Ruler

Machiavelli believed that a nation would progress only when a harmonious bond between 'fortuna' and 'virtu' took place. Fortuna is the factors and situations which can affect nations and princes. This can't be just termed as mere luck or destiny. When 'fortuna' is used by the prince to allow himself to gain the upper the this is a way harmonious bonding can take place. In return, the prince reduces the chance of Fortuna not working when times are not in his favour. The prince demotes his dependability on it and he doesn't rely on the immunity provided by her.

Machiavelli established that a corrupt society needed a monarch who believed in absolutism and this would help Italy transform drastically as it had lost its civic virtue. Italy had been

devastated by corruption and this made the setting up of the Italian Republic virtually unattainable. Virtù needs to be imbibed in citizens and this can happen when they follow laws that are proper, get training and have an education. When corruption seeps in deep a nation-state cannot rescue itself. Such a state requires an all-powerful lawmaker who aims at the common good by setting an undiluted foundation.

It is surprising to find that how Medici a strong monarch thinks of hiring Machiavelli an ardent republican who served in Soderni's administration. This puts us in a doubt that why such a stance is taken. The answer to this is given in Chapter XX of his book 'The Prince'. Machiavelli says that that the most loyal supporters to a new prince are those who were earlier hostile to him. This is because they want to prove to the Prince their undying fidelity and this can be fulfilled only through service which is notable and exemplary. Once the Prince recognizes them for their work, they tend to be his most trusted and loyal advisors. This wasn't just written by Machiavelli just to prove his loyalty to the Medici and he strongly believed in this approach.

Machiavelli wants to have a separate bifurcation in political affairs and private mortality. He wants absolute powers to remain in the hands of the Prince who according to him must be an autocratic monarch who knows how deceit and force must be used in the betterment of the State (Bellioiti, 1978, p. 296).

His absolute monarch is in no way a despot or an individual who just looks for his benefit. He is the one who has to look at the common good of the society and must not fall prey to the special interest groups or his benefit. The Prince and the Discourses are works written as a plan to reunite Italy while the former was written so that unification of Italy could be prioritized and the latter was more appreciative for republicanism which could only be practiced in nations where it would be more fruitful (Bellioiti, 1978, p. 298).

Critique

Plato did conclude that the entire conglomeration of citizens wouldn't be able to acquire the science of statesmanship after he evaluates his model state in his book 'The Republic'. Ruling the commonwealth as per its laws and constitution is known as a monarchy. When the ruler has no regard for the laws and regulations, he forms a tyrannical government and when few people run machinery then it becomes an aristocratic society. If few of such people start controlling the affairs then this becomes an oligarchy. When the governance is carried out by many irrespective of whether laws are flouted or not then that becomes a democracy.

Few men ruling the state offer the sinew for good or bad and when many are involved in the control of the government then that brings weakness to the government. Plato thus considers democracy as the worst form of government in which a person can succeed but he also considers it as the one in which through corruption you can achieve or do anything.

Machiavelli in the end emphasizes the ways and means to strengthen the state and he wants the state to increase its sphere of power and minimize the faults by which the ruler could risk losing his seat and can face being an outcast. He is in the constant pursuit of the 'reason of state'. Through this, he believes that the actions were undertaken by the ruler to justify his end objectives. He wants the Prince to be exalted and praised by all in his state and this is achieved by conquering new lands and preserving the existing state. His focus differs from that of Plato who is focused on the development of his ruler 'The Philosopher-King. Much of his concern is towards how the government can improve its mechanism to function more effectively. He believes that weak people can't rely just upon themselves because of their very selfish human nature. He wants the Prince to be self-conceited because of the nature of humans. While Plato believed in the justice of the Philosopher-King, Machiavelli on the other side was convinced that in a corrupt state like his only a strong ruler could help the republic unite.

Plato wanted the participation of both men and women who were capable to be a part of the guardian class while Machiavelli wanted women to be excluded from the process of administration. Machiavelli believed in the use of legal remedies to stop violent acts in the state. The state could only be protected if the administration would be reliant on the laws. Plato on the other hand places the Philosopher King above the Law and trusts his judgment as a command.

Machiavelli's concept of state is morally neutral when compared to the Platonic concept. Plato considers that it was the state's duty to shape the minds of the citizens to improve their morals and thereby making this would make them great citizens. Machiavelli thought exactly the opposite and thus some Thinkers consider the Machiavellian state as much more modern when brought to comparison with the Greek and the Romans.

In 'The Republic' Plato rejected the city-state model and he was of the opinion that not everyone in the state should be able to govern. He wanted the ruler to have thorough knowledge in fields such as mathematics, astronomy and he greatly emphasized the education of the ruler.

Machiavelli on the other hand understood the problems which were facing the Italian state. Corruption had very much seeped into the social fabric of 16th century Italy. His solution was to have a ruler who would be using the might and strength of the Armed forces to bring unity amongst cities that were embroiled. He believed that the Prince would lose his state when he would want more luxuries instead of having a well-equipped military.

Machiavelli has given full authority to his ruler when it comes to crossing the moral boundary. To increase the power of the state there should be no hindrance that would restrict him. He doesn't want the ruler to be an innocent lamb amid wolves because he knows that not all people are good. He recommends if people don't trust the ruler, then the ruler must not reciprocate the same to them.

Machiavelli doesn't want the Prince to be loyal at all times. He gives the Prince the freedom to pursue his objectives with all means possible. The immoral means used don't concern him. Machiavelli thinks that if violent measures are taken to preserve the State, then they are taken in the larger interests of the society. When excessive liberty is given to people chaos might reign in and thus by taking corrective measures the ruler can save the lives of many people.

Machiavelli's ruler is brought in to rescue the failed Italian State in the 16th century. He should be an astute ruler and administrator who can take the challenges thrown at him head-on.

When compared to Machiavelli Plato doesn't view power as something which should be used to dominate over other states and he was much more and more intrigued to use power in the state to establish an ideal one. For Plato power was the means to achieve a higher purpose which included having a state which worked for the betterment of the people, which focused on developing an individual who will be an asset to the state. Plato values religious teachings while Machiavelli doesn't focus on issues that are beyond the boundaries of politics. Machiavelli looks at power as an end objective he and he looks at power as such a thing that should be acquired, preserved and expanded (Behzadi, 1977, p. 22)

Machiavelli is deeply concerned with the city-state system and has spent a great deal of time improvising on the mechanism of the government. He looked at Rome and was inspired by it and he wanted the Roman system to be replicated in a United Italy.

Plato was a huge critic of the city-state system and the rule of the majority. He saw many flaws in the democratic system which was present and his work *The Republic* was the way he saw to rectify these flaws. One key feature which distinguishes Plato and Machiavelli is that the former wants to have a ruler trained to be a Philosopher-King and the latter wants a hereditary ruler such as the Prince who is already prepared to rule.

Machiavelli's writings lead up to developing the notion of sovereignty as the state which he wanted was not some abstract idea such as the ideal state of Plato and thus he didn't pay attention to the notion of sovereignty.

Conclusion

Modern view on Plato and Machiavelli's Theories on State and Power

Plato and Machiavelli wrote on the State when the nation-state system didn't even exist. Although their theories on the state and the way power should be exercised by a ruler still remains relevant to this day.

Machiavelli looks at administration as an art and he very well wants the ruler to indulge into the art of governance. Moral compulsions don't bind his ruler. The sole goal of running the state is to have the state succeed. Machiavelli looks at weak states as the ones which are susceptible to stronger ones (Thayer, 1892). He commands the princes to be strong and to use

force to preserve their Power. These days we do find rulers in Communist states such as the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea who use all kinds of means to reign on people.

President Xi of China is considered to be an autocratic person and he himself is coming from an Aristocratic family. His father was a high-ranking member of the Communist Party of China in the decades of 1950 to the 1980s. This gave him a lot of opportunities to progress within the party and rise up to become the Head of the Chinese State. President Xi is often given credit for expanding China's sphere of influence throughout the world. In the same way as Machiavelli calls for building up an army today President Xi has tried to exert force of the Chinese Armed Forces. China has never looked at its neighbours as allies but always as competitors. Machiavellian concept of expansion of the State is followed wholeheartedly in China.

President Putin of Russia too is seen a ruler who is very much dedicated to the Russian State. He has made significant advancements throughout his leadership in Russia. Russia was a very weak state after the collapse of the Soviet Union and it did a face a leadership crisis when President Yeltsin left office. After assuming the presidency, he has rebuilt Russia into a modern state. Consolidating power in Russia he is seen as the 'Prince' who is leading his state into Glory.

Plato's relevance of his Philosopher-King can be seen the training given to state administrators throughout the world. The Civil Service exam conducted by the Union Public Service Commission of India can be compared with the educational training which Plato wants his ruler to go through. Not all are meant to pursue education meant for the Philosopher-King in the same way not every individual who aspires to become a civil servant in India is able to be one. Today we might not find politicians who are trained rigorously to administer the state but they do have skilled administrators who can execute their vision.

The cruelty which Machiavelli speaks of is seen in North Korean dictator, Chairman Kim Jong-un. To protect the interests of the North Korean State he uses measures which are very brutal to Crack down on people who dissent on his leadership. Through fear and control he has maintained a grip on his citizens.

The modern embodiment of the Head of State can originate from the vision which Plato set for his Philosopher-King. Plato does look for a ruler who has given his life for the service of the State. The oath of Indian President also requires him to "devote his life to the well-being and service of the people of India". Though the position of the Head of State is symbolic it signifies and embodies the State.

Building an Ideal State or Republic is no easy task and these two Thinkers have strived for perfection in their own times. The political and social circumstances might have compelled them to suggest measures which are often considered harsh but upon considering their flaws they did decide and what could be much better. If the concept of State and Power needs to be

re-examined in today's generation we must focus on what better can be done to improve the prevalent problems than to find solutions for problems which might arise.