

Truth in politics

[Politics](#)



War for Plato is essentially unjust and the only justification for it is for defending the state, while for Machiavelli a state exists to wage war against other states - thus, war is a natural condition in a state's existence. Plato and Machiavelli also lived in different eras. For the former, philosophy is concerned with the truth, as embodied by principles and how things should be, and this concern would naturally result in a perfect society. For the latter, philosophy is allied with the realities of power, in how things are as they are. Philosophers in Plato's Republic are the only ones ideal to rule (and become kings) because they love and search for the truth - as opposed to the other two classes, the people who are mainly concerned with honor, and the masses, who are concerned with money and the indulgence of physical appetites. The philosopher-kings possess the quality of truthfulness who "will never intentionally receive into their minds falsehood, which is their detestation, and they will love the truth." Truth, as conceived by Plato, is absolute, dealing with the eternal and the unchanging, the "forms" opposed to the fickle, the merely seen and experienced. Thus, the ruler must be morally virtuous and behave by way of the eternal, consistent aspects of the truth. While Plato encourages the love of truth, this was not meant for truth sake's alone. The purpose of striving for the truth, for justice, is also meant to help the city or state the individual lives in. In turn, the observance of "shadows", prejudices, opinions and the like from the immersion in public life, would only strengthen the resolve of the individual to go back to the truth of eternal "forms" and bear this knowledge to help and improve society. The absolute truth may not be entirely knowable but for Plato, but this is what humanity should strive towards. This is because the experience is limited and the search for the truth should go beyond it.

Machiavelli's truth is the necessary or "effective" truth - in that the Prince or the ruler has only use of the truth if it would result in allowing the Prince to stay in power or defeat his enemies. If it would be useful or wise, to tell the truth, and keep promises, then that is what the Prince must do. However, since his observance of human nature rested mainly on man's fickleness and disloyalty, he proposes that it is wise for the Prince to use deceit, lies, and manipulation in order for the ruler to stay in power and outfox his enemies. Machiavelli is a realist whose arguments rested on his actual observations of statesmanship during the time of vulnerable Italian city-states in the 15th to 16th centuries ("And many have imagined for themselves republics and principalities that no one has ever seen or known to be in reality" - The Prince, Chap. 15). He observed that the way men ought to live is in vast contrast to how they actually do in reality. Machiavelli wrote that a prince or ruler who would always act according to the moral dictates of his conscience would be destroyed and thus, places the State in danger since so many others are not virtuous or moral at all.