

Machiavelli: realism over idealism

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Luke Pelagio Due 5/27/2011 Period 4 Machiavelli: Realism Over Idealism

Niccolo Machiavelli is known as being an archetypical realist; in other words, he was someone who originated the idea that we should not try to figure out how people should be, but rather accept and deal with the world as it literally is. Unlike Machiavelli, Plato posited an idealist view of a philosopher king reigning through virtue. To Machiavelli, this is an extremely dangerous delusion for it ignores what he considers the reality of the human condition: humans are brutal, selfish, and fickle (Machiavelli and Power Politics).

You don't need a philosopher king to secure off enemies and reinforce order/stability; on the other hand, you need a prince or a leader who understands what it takes to lead. It is better to be feared than loved if you can't be both. " Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hated; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women," (Machiavelli, The Prince).

Machiavelli applied force to get what he wanted, but he always kept his hands off the property of others. This is because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony (Machiavelli, The prince). In The Prince, Machiavelli demonstrates how to obtain and keep political power. This is what he did using witty tactics. 1 A prince must always pay diligent attention to military circumstances if he wants to reside in power, so the most desirable and beneficial type of army are native troops, composed of one's own citizens or subjects.

The prince has many characteristics that are crucial to his standing in a society such as: it is better to be stingy than generous, it is better to be cruel than merciful, it is better to break promises if keeping them would be against one's interests, and princes should choose wise advisors rather than flatterers. All these attributes are key to how well a Prince thrives (Public Bookshelf, *The Prince*). A prince must learn not to be limited to morality when unavoidable; a leader has to be able to use lies, force and deception if required in the world. Whether it is better to be feared or loved clearly addresses the reason for this.

You can't trust people, for they will turn on you. It is inevitable. Human nature means that doing what you must do at all costs according to any moral code simply puts you at a disadvantage. In addition, humans are generally under agreement to throw out such moral concerns if it is to their advantage. "Men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails," (Machiavelli, *The Prince*).

This quote perfectly demonstrates Machiavellian realism. First, it is a very opposing and adverse view on human nature. Second, it is realistic and logical. If, by any chance, you are a prince or a leader, and you do not understand the atrocious inherent in 2 men, you will fail. Those who are most ruthless will have power; this is just reality. "For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is

seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly.

She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her,” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*). Machiavelli politics is definitely aimed toward the masculine side. It is power and control, so fortune is feminine and more anarchy. If not under control, it will be unstable and chaotic. His influence stretches far beyond Italy in the sixteenth century and lies with us today in how we think/understand the world of international relations.

Everything I have read such as: ideas about Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, and Nicolo Machiavelli are all extremely important to my knowledge and insight about political concepts/background. I believe that to be educated one must have familiar knowledge with those who have shaped today's political society and government. Machiavelli's ideas, in particular, are used everywhere today. One who has not been informed of Nicolo Machiavelli would be living in ignorance, for that individual would be clueless of how ideas today became what they are/how they are.

When President Nixon organized the Watergate Scandal in 1973, the public had no inclination that their leader was capable of such corrupt and unscrupulous means. Nixon, under the impression that his campaign was vulnerable, manipulated for power in the only way he saw fitting, hoodwinking. Take a look at President Truman; he dropped a bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki reaching casualties of 120, 000. According to him, survival of the United States was so admonished that the use of such insignificant means was necessary.

Even President Obama has his faults. The ideas of hope were what we, the people, needed to hear. It would allow us to be optimistic, and contain a false sense of protection thinking that everything would work out. Barak Obama made many promises; he said everything that we would ever want to hear. However, none of his promises have come true. Maybe in extremely insufficient ways we are approaching the goals of what he promised. This is barely noticeable though. In conclusion, the tactics and ideas formed and created by Nicolo Machiavelli are ingenious.

President Obama noticed that Machiavelli's ideas "work," and he used them to his advantage to help him become the President of the United States of America. Lastly, I don't think that I could live in a Machiavellian-ruled/based society. While the Prince or ruler thrives, the people are lied to and don't have very much value. One thing is absolute, though: Machiavelli's ideas can't be ignored or discarded simply because we do not wish them to be true. We must accept the reality of everything, and do something positive for our country. 4