

The prince

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The following paper will be an argument debating how Machiavelli exemplified state power in his book *The Prince*. Also, the idea of state power can sometimes have a counter-intuitive effect on ordinary morality, and such moral issues are dissected through Machiavelli's writings. The theory of the state will be highlighted and how it breaks with classical political thought or how it coincides with classical political thought will be emphasized.

In view of these findings there must also exist an example of classical political thought, therefore *Canterbury Tales* will be examined for a compare and contrast on the power of the state and ordinary morality. There must exist a fair representation of two different types of state and the power that is harbored in each in order for an objective evaluation of government and morality to be assessed.

The breeding of *Canterbury Tales* and Machiavelli's *The Prince* will bring forth more focus on the concepts of morality and classical tradition of politics. Machiavelli's suggestion that the end justifies the means is an invitation to use betrayal, murder, and deceit when necessary to gain political power, and it is in this context that ordinary morality gives way to political power. He also believed that mob rule is not an acceptable way to achieve power because the people are fickle and change allegiance easily.

In his view of government the most powerful and dependable types of military forces are the national armies. In the construct of a government Machiavelli states in *The Prince* that it is better for a prince to be feared than loved, because fear depends on oneself, while being loved depends on one's subjects, and thus the combination of political power and ordinary morality

converge. It is with state power that a prince should be concerned with because when placing complete trust in the people, conflicts abound.

The prince then, in Machiavelli's imagery of the fox and the lion should be both strong and cunning, and the best way a prince can gain respect and admiration is to win impressive military victories, and so morality must give way so that what may be accomplished and thus the power of the prince secured. The four types of principalities discussed in *The Prince* include hereditary, mixed, new and ecclesiastical. In these principalities Machiavelli's objective is to describe the nature of power. His concept of power, his political hero and role model then is Cesare Borgia.

With this role model it is no wonder that Machiavelli's principal blame for Italy's political weakness is placed on incompetent Italian princes and their advisors. Machiavelli himself was a political realist. In his political realism he has at least three golden rules or precepts in *The Prince*, they are: Machiavelli writes of how a prince should have humanity. This meaning that a prince should have a common bond with his people, and so classical political thought, that is a government for the people as well as the prince remains standard in Machiavelli's writing.

However, Machiavelli was double-dealing when he wrote *The Prince* and although a prince should pay close attention to his subjects the true gain of power remains with control. Machiavelli also wrote (in his double-dealing) that a prince will remember the flesh he wears and that the lowliest servant wears the same as he, and so ordinary morality becomes integral in the process of ruling a kingdom. A prince should also 'know thoroughly the

nature of the people and one of the populace to know the nature of Princes” (32).

This is how a prince should reflect on his kingdom. Remembering the tie between him and his people, but also the difference which separates them; Royalty. Also, being royalty comes with privileges, but also the duty of ruling wisely. A prince has fortune and luxury that he must guard for they are keys to his power. He also must sometimes sacrifice this for the future and well being of his country.

Of the power that a prince must exercise in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he states, ...I say that every prince must desire to be considered merciful and not cruel...A prince, therefore, must not mind incurring the charge of cruelty for the purpose of keeping his subjects united and faithful; for, with a very few examples, he will be more merciful than those who, from excess of tenderness, allow disorders to arise, from whence spring bloodshed and rapine; for these as a rule injure the whole community, while the executions carried out by the prince injure only individuals...Nevertheless, he must be cautious in believing and acting, and must not be afraid of his own shadow, and must proceed in a temperate manner with prudence and humanity, so that too much confidence does not render him incautious, and too much diffidence does not render him intolerant. 89 This then, is the main subject of Machiavelli's view on how a prince should govern his kingdom.

It is neither with extreme hate or extreme mercy, but a balance between the two. It is also with the use of power that a prince can control his subjects and when necessary sacrifice the individuals over destroying a whole community

if that is truly what is needed. It is better to destroy a few things than to have the entire kingdom become desolated.

A prince should not be actively fearful but instead should incite fear, because it is better to be feared than loved because fear can be controlled and as mentioned prior, love is objective and herein lies the classical tradition of political thought: fear is how to control. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote Canterbury Tales is told by way of pilgrims on a journey; some of these are parables while others have political entanglements. The purpose that Chaucer had in mind while writing these 'short stories' was to indicate the failings of human nature in varying capacities; just as Machiavelli intrigues dictators and royalty on how to appropriately rule their land so did Chaucer instruct his readers on how to go about certain situations by telling of how the characters went through the same situations the wrong way.

A very strong theme throughout the stories is that of religion and how faulty the religious leaders are during the course of the stories is what alludes to the differing value system of the clergy (at least for these characters. One tale in particular The Knight's Tale has a political undertone which matches in part the beliefs and protocol illustrated by Machiavelli. The tale begins with two knights, Arcite and Palamon who are taken prisoner during battle and taken to King Theseus. While both knights are imprisoned they come upon the vision of Emelye who is the sister of Queen Hippolyta, and fall in love. Either knight eventually leaves prison, though during different times. Both knights fight over their love of Emelye and this fight turns into a type of political gain when King Theseus interjects between the altercation and makes it into a public affair.

Each knight is instructed to gather an army together and in a year's time rejoin the fight. The knights and Emelye pray to separate gods who in the story fight over who should win the battle (this is a classic layering done throughout Canterbury Tales). The end of the tale sees Emelye victorious, but dead from an earthquake and he grants happiness to the union of Palamon and Emelye. This alludes to different aspects of Machiavelli's writing in that the idea of justice is the primary attribute of the story. Each prayer is separately but rightfully fulfilled; though not to the expectations of Arcite whose prayer only included victory and not marriage.

The value that may best be deciphered in this work is that of knowing one's goals and purpose in conquest before actually beginning a battle; which value may also be found in *The Prince*. Thus, it would seem that the values portrayed by Machiavelli, though not witty are cunning in their advancement just as much as the god Saturn dictates the rules or justice for the triangle of lovers so does Machiavelli play the role of the interloper in deciding the proper course to gain one's desires. Although there are many other similarities and differences between these two works the main theme of justice and the fulfillment of purpose seems to run concurrent for either work and therefore the value system between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages has a bridge with this theme.