

The prince vs. the republic assignment



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Such republics or principalities do not exist in reality and are entirely hypothetical situations. Plato treats his republic as a means of demonstrating that there is a certain way for all people in a state to live peacefully if they are trained to possess an inherent good. However, it is through Machiavelli's more realistic view of human nature that this idea is refuted. An entire State cannot remain good forever, as aspects Of human nature will always shine through despite any teachings otherwise. Man will always maintain base desires and needs, which would eventually lead to the demise of an idealistic republic such as Plato's.

Machiavelli's view of humanity leads him to set up a far more realistic set of rules for enabling a prince to successfully rule his or her subjects. For example, Machiavelli focuses primarily on the appearance to his or her subjects as a ruler. If a prince appears to be good, but is also in some respects driven by base desires in ruling, then he will possess a level of prowess that will allow him to wield his power in such a way that will lead to a stable kingdom. For Machiavelli, the prince's knowledge of politics implies a level of deception towards his subjects.

It is this deception that leads to a false appearance of goodness in the eyes of the people, which leads to a trust between the two. Once the ruler possesses the trust of the people, he can then control his kingdom in a way that satisfies his needs and the needs of the people. In the Republic, Plato focuses on the need for clarity and reality as opposed to appearances and the everyday deception that can lead to a lack of goodness. He believes that the knowledge and application of the good will lead to a perfect state.

However, this cannot be said to be realistic, as despite the education of the good, one's desires will ultimately overcome the need to be good and the state will collapse. If the rulers are only thinking of the overall good of the state, their own needs will not be met, which can lead to unhappiness on the part of the rulers and ultimately to the downfall of the system. Machiavelli implies in his criticism that the needs of the ruler must be met in order to maintain a stable state, he must trust his instincts and base desires in order to remain true to himself.

If he does not, as Plato states and does as he ought to, not as he wishes to, then he will be living a lie within himself and not rule as he should. Without being true to what human nature tells one to do, an uprising either within the ruler or of the subjects will take place and the State cannot stay afloat. As Plato states in the republic "the desires of the less respectable majority are controlled by the desires and the wisdom of the superior minority" (Part 5, 431 d), however one cannot suppress all of the desires forever and the people will finally realize the oppression that they are experiencing and rise against the "superior minority".

The minority will not possess the power needed to control the "less respectable majority" if the only qualities they possess are good. The force needed will not be present as in Plato's republic no guardian wishes to do inflict harm on any human being, however it is Machiavelli that states that this is absolutely necessary in maintaining order in a state. Without this force, there is not a true level of hierarchy and authority and the people who are meant to be good will not remain as such forever.

Machiavelli also states in his rules for a principality, that it is necessary to have only one ruler for the state, as more than one can lead to a fault in the system. However, Plato maintains that it is necessary to have more than one ruler who is just and good controlling the state, as only one leader will always seek more power. This is where the two teachings differ so greatly. From Machiavelli's perspective, seeking out power is the primary goal of a prince or ruler, but Plato maintains that the rulers should be born into power, not seek it and that they should only use their power to the benefit of the state.

Machiavelli derives his rules from the ideas that man is inherently bad and will act accordingly to make himself happy. Therefore his rules for a principality are realistic and his criticism of Plato legitimate. Plato's republic stems from unrealistic ideals of human nature and the fact that education can override base desires and needs of people. However, he is not taking into account what can happen if these desires are suppressed for too long, which is that they will resurface and disrupt the order of the state.