

The morals of the prince – machiavelli essay sample

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“The Prince” by Niccolò Machiavelli is a historic work dedicated to Lorenzo de’ Medici, the former ruler of Florence. This work is a textbook for those who want to maintain power and gain control (Niccolò Machiavelli, n. d.). “The Prince” includes theoretical interpretation of the role of a ruler, and gives practical advice how to keep power and maintain strict control. This work has many limitations which cannot be applied to all people and rulers, but they are still vital for understanding human nature and behavior.

Machiavelli supposes that, very often, the ruler must decide what is good and what is bad, and do evil rather than good if it benefits him. The same interpretation concerns love and hate: “Since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved” (Machiavelli, 1998). I disagree with Machiavelli and suppose that people should recognize justice and altruism, and have the wit to distinguish between virtue and sin, make wise judgments about what kind of conduct is good for them, about how to get along with themselves as well as with the rest of natural surroundings. Human nature can be described as a blend of good and bad traits and inclinations.

I agree that there are no absolute standards of what is good and what is right, but there is the obligation to choose what is right in every particular situation and to make this decision in the light of all available evidence. In this situation, it is morally wrong to be “ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain” (Machiavelli, 1998). This position would lead to moral degradation and cultural decay (Skinner 2000).

Probably, the most controversial part of the work argues that a prince should follow the principle of his own benefit; he should not make friends, because they can betray him, etc. "A prince is also esteemed when he is a true friend and a true enemy, that is to say, when he comes out in favor of one against another without hesitation" (Machiavelli, 1998). I suppose that most people are good, and only difficult life circumstances and grievances force them to behave badly. Machiavelli analyzes advantages and threats of power, and advises the Prince to be watchful about possible threats to his power and the reins of government.

This statement can be partially applied to a contemporary leader. "Nothing so much honors a man newly come to power as the new laws and new ordinances he brings into being" (Machiavelli, 1998). Machiavelli illustrates that if people are united they are stronger, but dangerous at the same time, like "auxiliaries". Supremely, a new leader should not change everything in order to maintain his power and strict control over the followers (population). In reality, new rules can be implemented only if the old law does not satisfy the needs of the society. (Parallels: "Machiavellian' Politics Today, n. d.)

Another discrepancy is the processes of gaining power. Machiavelli explains to the Prince the necessity of an army and discipline for a successful reign, and discusses different tactics: "To desire to acquire is truly something very natural and ordinary" (Machiavelli, 1998). I suppose that rulers may exercise authority as an attribute of position only. An ideal ruler should keep morals and be an example for his followers, because only in this case the leader will be recognized.

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The Prince should follow a liberal way of ruling, but only if it does not weaken his influence on the state and his power: “ if you want to maintain the name of liberal among men, it is necessary not to spare any sumptuousness” (Machiavelli, 1998). Machiavelli’s advice to rulers would fail in modern society based on democratic principles. Some concepts expressed by Machiavelli cannot be used by a leader, because they are inapplicable to the concepts of liberty and freedom (Ledeen 2000).

In sum, people are not bad as described by Machiavelli. What is good in one situation may be fatally bad in another. The dogmas have not been changed, but our interpretation of them and our understanding of the political process and human nature differs greatly from the Middle Ages.

Works Cited Page

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