

A critical analysis of machiavellis the prince philosophy essay



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You have got to be cruel to be kind. Would this be an adequate summary of Machiavelli's advice on cruelty? If so, why? If not, why? How does his advice on cruelty reflect his beliefs about politics?

In the Prince, Machiavelli explores the world of governments and rulers and comes up with revolutionary ideas for a prince to acquire the leading position in the government and maintain his authority and leadership. However, the philosopher does not teach the ruler to be good and just; his aim is to provide the governor with practical applications of being a great prince but not a good one. Machiavelli focuses on evil features more because they would help to advance the power of the prince. In his book, it does not seem that an evil or cruel behavior is an unacceptable one, as he alters the moral vocabulary about vice and good. In the book, Machiavelli starts with his dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici and finishes it with an assertion that Italy must revive and gain considerable power. Therefore, it is hard for me to judge if the philosopher was concerned with acquiring a better vocation or with genuine patriotic feelings that were expressed in his attempt to call for dramatic action. Yet, I will argue that in terms of Machiavelli a potential ruler has to pretend to be an 'old prince'-the one that is familiar with the experiences of his predecessors-and act as if he is kind. This pretence makes a cruel prince a kind one and preserves his glory and prosperity of a state, which are supposed to be the aims of the ruler.

In chapter fifteen, Machiavelli states that "Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth. For it is far from how one lives to how one should live. That he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation"

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(p. 54). The passage hints to the Plato's Republic, in which he reports that the philosopher kings should govern society. The governors have to be good and just and they must help their subjects to maintain the purity of their souls and also be good. In the Prince, " a ruler should read historical works, especially for the light they shed on the actions of eminent men... to imitate some eminent man, worthy of praise and glory" (p. 51). However, Machiavelli is interested in an actual truth of the matter and not the utopia of it. He compares a prince to a prophet, which does not necessarily mean that he has divine knowledge; instead it gives them exceptional responsibilities like law making and shaping opinions that govern our lives. Thereby, Machiavelli's prophetic prince has philosopher's features as he tries to reform human opinion over the justice and evil; he acts as if he is good, but does not have to be good. To back up his conclusions, Machiavelli comes up with extreme examples such as Romulus' and Cain's murders of Remus and Abel respectfully. These murders were the fundamentals of the societies and, therefore, the philosopher asserts that no good is possible without evil. Thus he redefines Plato's ideas of the philosopher kings who approach pure reason to be good and just; instead, Machiavelli gives examples of extraordinary situations and draws the morality that would perfectly fit the situation. Also, he reforms the meaning of the word virtù: a prince can act in an evil fashion, " as fortune and circumstances [would] dictate" (p. 23) in the chapter thirteen, he gives an example of the biblical story of David and Goliath. In the initial story, David is armed with a sling only; but, the philosopher also gives him a knife. This detail hints that the God's promise is not enough and David would be safer with an additional secret weapon. This additional detail is a metaphor, which implies that the prince has to

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propagandize proper religious views; on the other hand, he has to use a certain extent of cruelty and be utterly self-reliant to achieve desirable outcomes. Self-realization, courage, and ruthlessness are the qualities that contribute to the effective exercise of power, which is a touchstone of political success. As Machiavelli puts it “ all the armed prophets conquered and the unarmed were ruined” (p. 20).

To describe the genuine prince, Machiavelli comes up with a metaphor of a beast. In chapter eighteen, he writes that there “ are two ways of contesting, the one by the law, the other by force; the first method is proper to men, the second to beasts; but because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second... it is necessary for a prince to understand how to avail himself of the beast and the man” (p. 62) Since in the Machiavellian theory the prince’s goal is to seek glory, the ruler has to be lucky. The luck or Fortuna is opposite to reason; it favors those who act or the brave. The Fortuna has to be mastered and, therefore, it requires a reservoir of force to master. Also, the deceit is, as Machiavelli puts it, a good quality. He exemplifies this with an Italian proverb “ Alexander never did what he said, Cesare never said what he did” (p. 35). Following the winds of fortune, power, and deception, one would be conferred with glory. The philosopher is a pure consequentialist, as he justifies anything that is necessary to preserve the glory of his state and his own fame. The Machiavellian virtue is not the same with the Christian values.

Thus, the duplicity of the prince and his behaviors are praised throughout the book and are perfectly excusable for the eventual purposes.

To underline an exemplary behavior of the prince, Machiavelli gives an example of Cesare's policies in chapter seven. When the duke had taken over the Romana, he found it had been commanded by impotent lords who had been readier to despoil their subjects than to correct them and had given their subjects matter for disunion, not union" (p. 23). Cesare sends a lieutenant to that area who "reduced it to peace and unity with the very greatest reputation for himself" (p. 23). However, Cesare did not want to have strong local government. Thus he set up court with wise civil authority that would judge and advocate each citizen from the lawlessness of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had emplaced one morning in the piazza in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. He had him cut in two; the bloody knife and piece of wood beside him." Machiavelli concludes that "the ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied" (p. 23). The princely virtù leaves people content and fooled.

In chapter fifteen on "the things for which man, and especially rulers, are praised or blamed," Machiavelli reflects on the very basic assertions of morality and virtues. He states that "a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must be prepared to act immorally when this becomes necessary" (p. 55). Thus the prince has to do what is generally done and not what he ought to do (p. 54). In other words, the chapter teaches the ways of not being good (in Plato's meaning of the word). To affect the norms of everyday life, the prince had to learn how to manipulate the religion skillfully. In chapter eighteen, the philosopher states that the ruler has to be utterly religious. "The prince should appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity and all

religion" (p. 62) the pretence to be a genuine Christian is helpful for creating an appropriate public image; however, the actual practice of its values is evidently dangerous. In the Republic, Socrates states that it is better to be just than to seem just. The prince's morale goes against the passage in the book, which teaches how to be good, as one cannot be good without being just. Considering the metaphor of the prince who reconciles a man and a beast, the man is a humble and submissive Christian, the beast in its turn is capable of performing courageous and bold actions.

In Machiavellian opinion, Christianity should not constrain any political activity. The matters of government should be solely secular. The philosopher strives to create a new type of republic, which would deal only with practical issues and without asserting any transcendental moral law. As a scholar Steven Smith asserts, "not only did Machiavelli bring a new worldliness to politics, he also introduced a new kind of populism... as Plato and Aristotle imagined aristocratic republics that would invest power in an aristocracy of education and virtue, Machiavelli deliberately seeks to enlist the power of the people against aristocracies of education and virtue." To maintain this kind of state, the republic has to have imperialistic ambitions and consequently be aggressive.

Interestingly, the Machiavellian republic concerns only with practical worldly affairs; however, it's the philosopher's imaginary project or theoretical suggestion of his form of government. The new type of morality is a foundation for this reign. Thus, Machiavellian prince always has to pretend to be a man, but be a beast if needed. Altering the hypostasis, the brave ruler masters the fortune and gains glory for himself and his state. The <https://assignbuster.com/a-critical-analysis-of-machiavellis-the-prince-philosophy-essay/>

philosopher's morality asserts that the prince does not have to be good; instead he has to manage to be religious and pure on the public eye, but reasonably cruel and not always trustful in the reality. He justifies the actions of the ruler with the privileges one gets from the prince's constant actions to maintain the prosperous state and peaceful sleep of the citizens. Thus the prince mixes his love for the good with the skillful cruelty. Machiavellian morale highlights that the good is only possible in the context of moral evil. This a clear break with Plato and the Christian values and, moreover, the philosopher seeks to set free the real politics from the ecclesiastical patronage. Thereby the prince uses religion for his benefit but does not allow himself to be used by it. One can see that Machiavellian authority is self-bestowed and not granted by ethereal forces. Machiavelli grants the rule with the knife he gives to David in one of his passages, signifying that the prince has to be more self-reliant than hoping for the otherworldliness help. In the Prince, a reader can access information that used to be not available to everyone. The philosopher gives the reader a chance to come to terms with the idea that the good in politics cannot exist without a certain extend of cruelty. Moreover, when this cruelty is adequately used, it becomes a virtue that sustains the well being of the state and makes the ruler glorious.

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