

Cesare borgia as machiavelli's instrument

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Using the model of Cesare Borgia in *The Prince*, Machiavelli proposes a new theory of virtue that is consistent with no moral standard other than what is called for by necessity. To do this, Machiavelli first discusses Cesare's virtue, and then proceeds to suggest how Cesare's virtue falls short. His interpretation of the rise and fall of Cesare's virtue in Chapter VII serves to demonstrate that Machiavellian virtue has a telos – it looks toward the end of not simply acquiring but maintaining the state. Cesare becomes the “instrument” of Machiavelli whose story is used not just to redefine virtue but to show the repercussions of this virtue for Machiavelli's chosen new prince, Lorenzo de' Medici. Although Machiavelli closes Chapter VII by showing that Cesare's virtues are ultimately incomplete, he does not deny the prince the virtue that is due him. The example of Cesare Borgia is a parable of the prince who acquires his state through, as the chapter title states, “others' arms and fortune” – those of his father, Pope Alexander VI – but whose inheritance is neither sufficient nor complete (7. 25). It is the parable of a special breed of “hereditary prince” who must become a “new prince” through his own virtue. He must “put his roots in the states that the arms and fortune of others had given him” (7. 27). There are two main ideas found in this depiction of Cesare's virtue. Virtue is necessarily adaptable, enabling one to build on what one has inherited, and it follows the trend of founding, the planting of one's roots. The new prince must found a new order through a constant reevaluation of virtue depending on his need. However, creating this new order requires renewing old orders through new modes (7. 32). What are the old orders restored through Cesare's virtue, and what new modes does he employ? As for old orders, Machiavelli offers three. First, Cesare renews the civic order of the state. His cruelty restored the

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Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and to faith,? in contrast to the Florentine people who sacrifice civic order for the appearance of mercy (17. 65). It is Alexander VI before him who upsets the orders of the Orsini and Colonna noble factions of Rome ? to bring disorder to their states so as to be able to make himself lord securely of part of them? (7. 27). These states are disrupted on the course toward Cesare? s security, and the virtuous prince, by uniting the Romagna, rebuilds what has been destroyed in the paving of his path. In addition, Cesare renews the public order through a bond with his people. This bond takes on a spiritual dimension through a covenant between the ruler and the ruled. Cesare kills his minister Remirro de Orco to show that the cruelty Remirro exercises, indeed cruelty in general, is necessary but not unconstrained ? when its necessity passes, it will too. Remirro is sacrificed to establish this covenant, ? to purge the spirits of that people and to gain them entirely to himself? (7. 30). Finally, Cesare fulfills the oldest order, that of the filial relationship and filial duty to his father Pope Alexander VI. As Cesare is used as Machiavelli? s instrument to redefine virtue, so Cesare, the new prince, is conceived as the ? instrument? of Alexander (11. 46). It was Alexander who ? decided to make his son the duke great,? and Cesare has been given this task as his patrimony: to fulfill the prophecy initiated by Alexander, with his sword drawn in the image of Moses, to become ? great? (7. 27). Cesare? s virtue is no less seen in the new modes with which he renews these old orders. The duke does not depend ? on the arms and fortunes of others? (7. 28). Instead, he shows the flexibility to adapt, going from auxiliary to mercenary arms until he becomes ? the total owner of his arms? (13. 55). The self-sufficient nature of the prince? s virtue is supplemented by its acquisitive nature. Machiavelli constantly focuses on <https://assignbuster.com/cesare-borgia-as-machiavellis-instrument/>

Cesare's ability to gain people to himself, because he understands that men have to be won over or lost (72E31). This acquisition extends to the future; Cesare is not content with his present fortune. He secures himself politically for what may come through four modes: eliminating the bloodlines of lords he had offended, winning over Roman gentlemen to keep the pope in check, gaining representation in the College of Cardinals, and acquiring empire to resist attacks (7. 31). The new mode with which Cesare operates is best captured in the listing Machiavelli gives at the close of Chapter VII: the mode of constant motion exhibited in the well-chosen, well-executed turn between virtue, as traditionally held, and vice. Cesare's ability to secure himself against enemies, to gain friends to himself . . . to make himself loved and feared by the people . . . to be severe and pleasant, magnanimous and liberal, to eliminate an unfaithful military, to create a new one, as necessity dictates, is testimony to his Machiavellian virtue (7. 32). However, Machiavelli's final judgment shows Cesare's virtue to be incomplete. If the prince had succeeded wholly, if he had grasped complete virtue, he would have stood by himself and would no longer have depended on the fortune and force of someone else, but on his own power and virtue (7. 31). Cesare does not stand by himself, ultimately, because he errs in the creation of Julius II as pope, whom his father had offended, and whose force brings Cesare down in the end. The duke has learned to be able not to be good but does not fulfill the second part of the equation: to use this and not use it according to necessity (15. 61). Machiavelli stresses that although Cesare could not make a pope to suit himself, he could have kept anyone from being pope (7. 33). Necessity drives the ideal prince, but what necessity called for and what was in Cesare's power to do thwarting the

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papal campaign of an offended man ? Cesare does not do. Instead of relying on his own power, he is obliged to rely on another's force. Cesare's virtue is imperfect because he believes that ? new benefits will make old injuries forgotten,? and in believing this, he ? deceives himself? (7. 33). Machiavelli uses the rise and fall of Cesare Borgia and his virtue to bring his new conception of virtue to its final form. Through the account of the prince, Machiavelli implies that virtue is teleological: it describes the means, but always looks to the end of holding the state. Cesare has failed to achieve complete virtue only because he loses his state. Yet as Machiavelli shifts between praise and reluctant condemnation of Cesare, he also wavers in judging the true cause of the prince's downfall. He first holds that it is Cesare's ? extreme malignity of fortune? before claiming that it is his error in condoning the making of Julius II, ? the cause of his ultimate ruin? (7. 27, 33). Either way, the story of Cesare is useful, especially when we consider The Prince as a work aimed at one man, Lorenzo de' Medici. If fortune has destroyed the prince, the reader is given the tale of the faultless man brought to fall because of his fortune. Through Cesare, Machiavelli shows the volatility of fortune and how disrespectful of virtue it is. Machiavelli writes in Chapter VI that fortune gives only the opportunity (6. 23). Fortune has now given Medici the opportunity; he must act. However, the reading seems to support that it is a shortcoming of virtue that destroys Cesare rather than his fortune. Machiavelli writes, ? in the things that lead men to the end that each has before him, that is, glories and riches, they proceed variously? (25. 99). Even against fortune's variability, the prince can ? proceed;? he can govern himself. And if he governs himself rightly, he will ? change his nature with the times and with affairs,? so that ? his fortune will not change? (25.

100). Virtue is not only an able opponent of fortune, but it is its ruler. Thus, if it is a shortcoming of virtue that brings Cesare's downfall, the new prince can then take for himself the virtue of Cesare, which Machiavelli does not deny, and complete it, by acquiring and maintaining the state. Machiavelli states that Medici has both fortune and virtue on his side, so either interpretation of Cesare's fall compels the chosen prince to ? to seize Italy and to free her from the barbarians? (26. 101). Machiavelli's agenda in its barest terms is to overthrow a morally rigid virtue for a virtue that is adaptable and expedient, but it is also to create a new prince who can obtain this virtue. To accomplish this agenda using Cesare as his instrument, Machiavelli examines Cesare's virtue and how it falls short, thereby proposing a new understanding of virtue with political implications pertinent to his time.