

What does
Machiavelli mean by
a corrupt people what
does he mean by
corrupt leaders...

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The prince is a book written due to the numerous social problems facing Italy. During his period, Machiavelli witnessed the fall of King Savoranala, and the fall of Italy. In Machiavelli's view, Italy fell to the French and the Spanish because of corruption of its leaders and people. One instance that depicts the corruption of the Italian leaders is their failure to protect Pistoia from the civil war between the families of Cancellieri and the Panciatichi¹. As the chancellor of Florence, Niccollo was sent to negotiate a peace deal between the two families, and when it failed, Niccollo advocated for Italy to send troops and forcefully restore order in Pistoia.

The political climate in Florence was against this, as a result a civil war ensued, and led to the mass murder of people in Pistoia. In Niccollo Machiavelli's perspective, it is better for a leader to practice cruelty, for purposes of stabilizing and protecting its people. Had Italy sent troops to Pistoia, few people would have died, as opposed to the thousands who died during the conflict. On this notion, Machiavelli states that the leaders are corrupt. This is because they are unable to protect the institutions of the state, and maintain order².

A corrupt people are those who are not loyal to the state, and this is depicted through their treachery, selfishness, ungratefulness, brutality and covetousness. In Machiavelli's view, these people are most likely to lead to the fall of the state if their actions are not checked, and behavior's controlled. In Niccolo Machiavelli's view, corruption among the people emanates when the leader, is lenient to them. Machiavelli denotes that because of the brutal and selfish nature of the people, it is dangerous for a leader to become a philosopher king³.

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This is a leader who rules through virtue, and in consideration to the rights of his people. A leader, who practices virtue while leading the state, is a corrupt leader, because he will fail in protecting his people, and his authority. To rectify this situation, Niccollo Machiavelli argues that it is wise for a leader to practice treachery, cruelty, and authoritarian leadership. Machiavelli states that it is wise for a leader to become a lion, as the time he is a fox.

Machiavelli used this example because a lion cannot avoid a trap, while a fox is powerless when attacked by a wolf⁴. To acquire skills of escaping the laid out traps, it is important for a leader to be a fox, and to portray strength, it is important for a leader to be a lion. On this note, to prevent the corruption of the people, and the subsequent fall of the state, the leader must learn on how to deal with deception, and realities of power politics. Machiavelli gave an example of Pistoia, whereby the city fell because of the notion of a virtuous leader, and the fall of Italy to the French and the Spanish, because of the corrupt people, and lack of a leader who was capable of uniting Italy, and protecting against its adversaries.

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