

# A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF MACHIAVELLISM

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## Abstract

*This work is chiefly an analysis of Machiavellianism, and via this philosophical method of analysis, it critically examines the political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli with a view to uncovering its central themes, implications, and enduring relevance to political practice. The study is influenced by the fact that Machiavelli revolutionized political thought by shifting attention from abstract moral ideals to the practical realities of power, leadership, and statecraft. His emphasis on virtù (the skill and capacity of the ruler), fortuna (the element of chance), and the calculated use of force and deception reflects a pragmatic orientation that continues to shape debates about governance and political survival. The objective of this research is to critically analyze Machiavelli's principles and evaluate their influence, not only within his historical context of Renaissance Italy, but also in their continuing application to modern political systems. The significance of this work lies in bridging classical political philosophy with contemporary political realities, thereby providing a framework for assessing leadership, the ethics of power, and the dynamics of state stability. Practically, the study highlights both the strengths and risks of Machiavellian tactics, offering insights into how political systems may balance realism with accountability and civic virtue. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on politics and morality, showing that Machiavelli's thought remains as provocative and instructive today as it was in his own era.*

**Keywords:** Machiavelli, Politics, Power, Leadership, Statecraft

## Introduction

Niccolò Machiavelli remains one of the most influential and controversial figures in the history of political thought. Writing during the turbulence of Renaissance Italy, he witnessed the collapse of republics, the rise of principalities, and the constant struggle for power among competing states. His works, most notably, *The Prince* and *The Discourses*, broke away from the traditional moral and theological frameworks of medieval political philosophy and introduced a pragmatic, realistic approach to politics. Machiavelli shifted the focus from how rulers ought to behave in an ideal sense to how they must act in the

realities of political life, where power, deception, and necessity often outweigh moral considerations. His philosophy has since become a central reference point in debates about leadership, governance, and the relationship between morality and politics.

This work aims to critically examine Machiavelli's political philosophy, analyzing its central themes and assessing its implications for political practice and theory. The **purpose** of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of Machiavelli's concepts of power, human nature, *virtù*, *fortuna*, and the tension between politics and morality, while also exploring the relevance of these ideas for both historical and contemporary political systems. The **significance** of this work lies in its enduring relevance. Machiavelli's ideas continue to provoke intense debate, as they challenge the assumptions of ethical governance and confront the realities of human ambition and political survival. By studying his thought, we gain insight not only into the foundations of modern political realism but also into the ongoing challenges of leadership, the quest for stability, and the pursuit of the common good in societies across time and place.

### **The Life and Works of Niccolò Machiavelli**

Niccolò Machiavelli was an Italian Renaissance political philosopher, historian, and diplomat, often hailed as the father of modern political science. He was born on May 3, 1469, in Florence, Italy. He was the third child of Bernardo di Niccolò di Buononsega. Bernardo was a civil lawyer who held several important public appointments. Bernardo Machiavelli took an active interest in Niccolò's education, enrolling him in Latin grammar lessons under Maestro Matteo in 1476. Niccolò became proficient in Latin but did not study Greek or Cicero's moral philosophy, which emphasized moral decision-making and virtuous conduct. Nonetheless, His father gave him access to classical texts, fostering an early humanist education. This education included grammar, rhetoric, and exposure to classical literature. Although detailed records of his formal education are scarce, it is clear that Machiavelli's familiarity with classical authors had a lasting influence on his intellectual development and political writings.

In Machiavelli's time, Italy was a divided country. Machiavelli was born in a tumultuous era. Bertrand Russell observed; "Few rulers were legitimate; even the Popes, in many cases, secured election by corrupt means." Italy of Machiavelli's time was divided into several small city-states. Italy, at the same time, was a country ravaged by political insinuations; that is, some parts were republics and others were under the control of despots, and noble families controlled the affairs of the states or provinces. Hence, nobles fought each other, and Italy was a big battleground of political intrigue. Besides, other European countries like Spain and France never ceased interfering in the affairs of Italy.

In 1494, Florence experienced major political upheaval marked by the expulsion of the Medici family. This event was driven by internal unrest and mounting external military threats. After Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1492, his son Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici took over leadership. However, Piero lacked his father's political skill and was seen as indulgent and disengaged from governance. His shortcomings led to increasing dissatisfaction

among Florentines, who ultimately ousted the Medici and reestablished a republican form of government. In the resulting political vacuum, Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola emerged as a central figure. A fierce critic of the Medici's secularism and Florence's moral decay, Savonarola introduced a theocratic republic aimed at moral reform and democratic principles. Yet, his rule did not last. By 1498, due to his harsh policies, economic decline, and conflict with the papacy, which led to his excommunication by Pope Alexander VI; Savonarola lost popular support, was arrested, tried for heresy, and executed. Shortly after Savonarola's execution, in June 1498, Niccolò Machiavelli, then 29 years old, was appointed to lead the Second Chancery of the Florentine Republic. This position made him responsible for domestic administration and policy. He was also named Secretary to the Ten of Liberty and Peace, the committee overseeing Florence's foreign policy and military matters. These appointments offered Machiavelli a deep understanding of both Florence's internal governance and international relations. Influenced by humanist ideals, he served with integrity, dedication, and a strong sense of civic duty.

Between 1499 and 1512, Machiavelli undertook numerous diplomatic missions on behalf of Florence. His assignments included visits to the court of Louis XII in France, the Spanish court, and the Papal States. Notably, in 1502 and 1503, he observed the actions of Cesare Borgia, the illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI, who was attempting to consolidate power in central Italy. Machiavelli documented Borgia's political maneuvers, which later influenced his writings on political strategy and leadership.

In 1512, the political dynamics of Florence underwent a significant transformation when the Medici family, with the backing of Spanish forces, reasserted their dominance over the city. This resurgence effectively dismantled the existing republican government and led to the ousting of numerous officials associated with the prior administration, notably Niccolò Machiavelli. Machiavelli, who had been instrumental in Florentine politics, found himself dismissed from his positions and marginalized from the political sphere.

The following year, in 1513, Machiavelli's fortunes further declined when he was implicated in a conspiracy against the Medici regime. This accusation resulted in his arrest. He was then, subjected to severe interrogation methods, including torture. Despite the harsh treatment, Machiavelli maintained his innocence and was eventually released. Subsequently, he retreated to his family's estate in San Casciano, located just outside Florence. This period of enforced seclusion marked the cessation of his active engagement in political affairs. ?

During his exile, Machiavelli channeled his experiences and insights into writing. Machiavelli wrote some of his most influential works, including *The Prince* (1513), a treatise offering practical advice on power acquisition and maintenance, *The Discourses on Livy*, which analyzes republican government, and *The Art of War*, focusing on military strategy and citizen militias. These works demonstrate his deep understanding of political dynamics. Afterward, he attempted to regain favor with the Medici rulers, notably dedicating *The Prince* to Lorenzo II de' Medici, but was unsuccessful. Machiavelli died in

Florence on June 21, 1527.

### **The Role of Human Nature in Machiavelli's Political Theory**

Niccolò Machiavelli's political philosophy is deeply rooted in his understanding of human nature. It is a bedrock upon which he constructs his ideas about governance, power, and authority. Machiavelli's understanding of humanity is often characterized as cynical and pragmatic, arguing that human behavior is primarily driven by self-interest and ambition. Machiavelli was interested in man not as he ought to be but as he is. Man, as Machiavelli viewed him, is self-centered. In this thinking, man existed not to seek God's favour but to seek and satisfy himself. For Machiavelli, man was:

Wicked, selfish, and egoistic. He was fundamentally weak, ungrateful, exhibitionist, anxious to avoid anger, and excessively desirous of gain. Lacking in honesty and justice, he was ready to act in a manner that is detrimental to the community. It was only under compulsion or when there was personal gain that an individual was ready to do good. Being essentially anti-social, anarchical, selfish, greedy, and sensual... would readily forgive the murder of his father but never the seizure of property.

Machiavelli conceived human beings as essentially egoistic, restless, ambitious, aggressive, and acquisitive, in a state of constant strife and anarchy; discontent and dissatisfied in their unlimited needs amidst scarce resources. For him, except if ruled with a beastly disposition, the progress of the state and the autonomy of the ruler could be easily jeopardized. He suggests that people are motivated by their own needs and desires rather than moral considerations. Thus, he advised the ruler that “It is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be lacking.” Machiavelli argues that rulers must exercise power and maintain authority through fear rather than compassion.

He also argues that because people are often simple and governed by immediate needs, they can be readily deceived. Therefore, a prudent ruler must be adept at manipulation, understanding that the appearance of qualities such as mercy, faithfulness, and integrity can be more advantageous than their actual possession. This perspective challenges the traditional notion that moral virtue is the cornerstone of effective leadership, instead proposing that the successful prince must navigate the complexities of human behavior with strategic cunning.

Furthermore, Machiavelli also posits that human nature is inherently fickle and inconsistent, which poses challenges for any ruler seeking stability within their principality. He contends that people's loyalties and opinions can shift rapidly, making it imperative for leaders to adapt to changing circumstances. Finally, Machiavelli's assessment of human nature is a clear departure from more idealistic views that emphasize virtue and morality in political leadership. He advocates for a realistic approach, whereby rulers must act by the inherent flaws of human behavior, employing deception and manipulation as necessary tools.

### **An Overview of *The Prince***

Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Italian: *Il Principe*), written in 1513 and published posthumously in 1532, is perhaps one of the most controversial and influential political treatises in Western political thought. *The Prince* is made up of 26 chapters and is further divided into two primary sections, each focusing on different but interrelated dimensions of political leadership. The first part (Chapters 1 to 14) is mainly descriptive and analytical, outlining the various forms of principalities and the methods by which they are acquired and preserved. The second part (Chapters 15 to 26) offers normative political advice, guiding rulers on how they should act to maintain power and effectively govern.

In the first part of *The Prince*, Machiavelli classifies principalities into several categories: hereditary, new, mixed, and ecclesiastical. Hereditary principalities, he notes, are the easiest to maintain since the ruling family's longstanding legacy makes the people more inclined to accept their leadership. In contrast, new principalities are far more difficult to govern because they often require suppressing opposition and managing high expectations from newly conquered populations. Mixed principalities, which are partially new and partially inherited, bring their own set of complexities, particularly when incorporating different cultures and political traditions. Ecclesiastical states, governed by the Church, are unique in that they are maintained through religious authority and not by conventional political means.

The second part of the book, spanning Chapters 15 to 26, transitions into practical and often controversial political counsel. Here, Machiavelli sets aside idealistic notions of governance in favor of a stark realism. This part shifts to **normative political theory**, offering **practical advice** on how a ruler should **behave**. It is here that Machiavelli's controversial and realistic views become most apparent. Topics include: The appearance of virtue versus actual virtue, whether it is better to be feared or loved, how to avoid hatred, how to use deception and manipulation wisely, and the importance of adapting to changing circumstances.

### **Machiavelli's Political Realism**

Machiavelli's political philosophy marked a significant departure from the traditional views of his time. From the point of view of traditional philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc., morality is seen as the yardstick for measuring good politics and political actions. It is used to checkmate the activities of rulers or leaders. Politics was linked with morality (ethics). What sets *The Prince* apart from earlier political thought, such as the idealism of Plato or the virtue ethics of Aristotle, is its radical separation of politics from morality.

In contrast to Plato's *Republic*, which envisioned the philosopher-king as a morally enlightened ruler, Machiavelli's prince is one who is cunning, strategic, and flexible. He must be able to "act the beast," combining the traits of the lion (strength) and the fox (cunning) in order to succeed. Machiavelli argues that political leadership should operate without moral constraints, advising rulers to disregard ethical considerations if they wish to succeed. According to Machiavelli, a ruler must use any means necessary, whether fair or

foul, to seize, maintain, and expand power. He asserted that the primary objective of politics is the acquisition and consolidation of authority, justifying the use of both moral and immoral tactics. A successful ruler, in Machiavelli's view, must be pragmatic, cunning, and decisive. Furthermore, while cruelty and harsh measures may be employed, they should be executed swiftly and effectively to ensure stability.

Machiavelli advised the Prince to disregard moral integrity, religious values, honesty, compassion, and humanitarian ideals, except when they serve his interests. While he should appear virtuous, he must use morality strategically, applying it only when beneficial to his objectives. A ruler should be watchful, shrewd, and capable of discerning when to employ either ethical or unethical tactics. Furthermore, he should be astute enough to tell the people what they want to hear while ultimately pursuing his own agenda.

Machiavelli's political philosophy was shaped by the power vacuum in Florence and the fate of religious leaders like Savonarola, who was executed for his Christian convictions. The failure of Savonarola would serve as a significant case study for Machiavelli. He highlighted the friar's inability to secure lasting political change due to his reliance on spiritual authority without the backing of military or coercive power. This observation underscores a central theme in Machiavelli's political philosophy: the necessity for leaders to possess both vision and the means to enforce their will. Machiavelli noted that Savonarola's inability to maintain authority stemmed from his lack of force to suppress opposition, leading to his eventual downfall. Omoregbe quoted Machiavelli as saying:

A prince, therefore who desires to maintain himself must learn not to be always good, but to be so or not as necessity may require. It is well that when the act accuses him, the result should excuse him, and when the results are good, it will always absolve him from blame... nor need he care about ensuring censure for such vices without which the preservation of his state may be difficult.

Machiavelli's assertion that the outcome of an action excuses and absolves a ruler from blame reflects his belief that the end justifies the means. According to him, as long as the desired outcome is achieved, any method (cruelty, brutality, dishonesty, lies, cunning) is justified. He argues that a ruler should use whatever means necessary to maintain power and secure the state. Committing to moral principles, in his view, could lead to a ruler's downfall. Machiavelli advises the Prince to reject Christian virtues such as patience, humility, mercy, and compassion, labeling them as weaknesses that could weaken both his subjects and the state. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of strength, ambition, vitality, and the relentless pursuit of power and success. He justifies his controversial political views by arguing that they are grounded in realism, unlike the idealistic notions of morality that have no place in actual governance. According to him, history proves that successful rulers attained power through strategic, often ruthless, actions rather than moral ideals. Machiavelli asserts that reality differs from how things ought to be, and effective leadership depends on practical, rather than ethical, decisions.

To support his argument, he cites Cesare Borgia, the ruthless son of Pope Alexander VI, as

an example of a leader who achieved greatness through decisive and sometimes brutal action. Machiavelli admired Borgia's decisiveness and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Borgia was skilled in using both force and diplomacy to consolidate his rule. He eliminated rivals and used strategic alliances to strengthen his position, which Machiavelli saw as a model for rulers who wish to maintain control. Machiavelli highlighted Borgia's use of controlled violence, particularly his appointment and subsequent execution of Remirro de Orco, a brutal enforcer.

Cesare Borgia effectively used calculated cruelty by appointing Remirro de Orco to restore order in the Romagna region through harsh and oppressive measures, but once stability was achieved, Borgia distanced himself from Orco's brutality by having him publicly executed in Cesena in 1502, displaying his dismembered body in the town square to appease the people and solidify his control through both fear and perceived justice. This act established order through fear but also distanced Borgia from excessive cruelty, reinforcing Machiavelli's belief that a ruler should be feared rather than loved. He noted Borgia's efforts to establish a loyal base by neutralizing potential threats and implementing administrative reforms to stabilize his territories. For Machiavelli, political success is dictated by power, not morality. Violence and murder could be used to achieve political ends.

Finally, Machiavelli's political realism centers on the belief that effective leadership is not bound by conventional morality but guided by practical necessity and the pursuit of power. In *The Prince*, he argues that rulers must be willing to deceive, manipulate, and even act immorally if such actions ensure the stability and success of the state. Rather than adhering to idealistic virtues, a prince must project the appearance of goodness while using cunning and cruelty when required.

### **The Role of *Virtù* and *Fortuna***

Niccolò Machiavelli's political philosophy is deeply rooted in the dynamic relationship between *virtù* and *fortuna*, two fundamental concepts that shape a ruler's ability to gain and maintain power. According to Machiavelli, one can become a prince by strength (*virtù*) or by luck (*fortuna*) – which are illustrated respectively by Francesco Sforza and Cesare Borgia:

Whereas Sforza rose from private citizen to Duke of Milan by exercising his virtue, Duke Valentino [Cesare Borgia] gained and later lost power through the fortune of his father, the Pope. Despite his undoubted virtue, his vulnerability to fortune in the form of his father's untimely death makes a paradigm of the vicissitudes of luck even to one who acts virtuously... An army that is capable of withstanding multiple attacks in a single battle can be defeated only when thwarted by luck.

*Virtù*, in the context of *The Prince* represents the qualities of strength, wisdom, skill, decisiveness, strategic intelligence, and cunning that a leader must possess to navigate the complexities of governance. Machiavelli emphasizes that *virtù* is not merely moral virtue but rather a collection of attributes that enable a prince to secure and maintain power. For instance, he argues that a successful ruler must be adaptable and pragmatic in responding to

circumstances. The concept of *virtù* is most clearly illustrated in Chapter 6 of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli discusses the qualities of historical leaders such as Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus (and Hiero of Syracuse), all exemplifying *virtù* by forging new states through decisiveness and strength. These figures understood the importance of skillful governance and the need to sometimes act immorally for the greater good of the state.

In contrast, *fortuna* represents the unpredictable forces of luck and fate, which can either favor or hinder political ambitions. Machiavelli warns, “a common failing of mankind is never to anticipate a storm when the sea is calm.” This means that when things are going well, most people think that things will continue in such a way forever. But the sensible prince makes plans for downfalls even when things are going well, and this would give him the best chance of survival. *Fortuna* destroys those who did not sufficiently safeguard their interests; being fickle, fortune could be contained only by those who had the capacity to change. Instead of yielding to Fortune, Machiavelli suggests that one had to act boldly and decisively; fortune would ruin those who did not protect or adapt themselves. In the words of Machiavelli:

... Fortune changes and men stand fixed in their old ways, they are prosperous so long as there is congruity between them, and the reverse when there is not. Of this, however, I am well persuaded: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious. For fortune is a woman who, to be kept under, must be beaten and roughly handled; and we see that she suffers herself to be more readily mastered by those who so treat her than by those who are more timid in their approaches. And always, like a woman she favours the young, because they are less scrupulous and fiercer, and command her with greater audacity.

However, there is one further complication. Some events are totally unexpected and cannot be foreseen or planned for. Machiavelli characterizes such changes as brought on by *fortuna*; a female goddess who typically raises people and knocks them down again. He says that this makes people believe that “events are controlled by fortune or by God in such a way that... men have no influence or whatsoever.” Machiavelli rejected such fatalism and asserted that abandoning our fate to outside force means denying our free will.

However, he came to a compromise. In Chapter 25, Machiavelli famously states that "*fortuna* is the arbiter of half our actions," in other words, fortune controls only half of human affairs while the other half depends on human agency. This emphasizes the fact that luck can undermine even the most skilled leaders. Despite this, Machiavelli insists that leaders must be impetuous, actively adapt, anticipate challenges, and shape their destinies as much as possible, rather than passively surrendering to fate. He illustrates this concept through historical examples where rulers faced sudden shifts in their fortunes due to external circumstances beyond their control.

Machiavelli suggests that while *fortuna* plays a significant role in the success or failure of a ruler, it is still the responsibility of the leader to prepare and adapt in response. Machiavelli

argues that while fortune plays a role in shaping events, a successful ruler must actively manipulate circumstances through calculated action and adaptability. He likens *fortuna* to a river that can flood unpredictably but can be managed through careful planning and preparation. This metaphor highlights the relationship between *virtù* and *fortuna*. Since fortune is like a raging river that can bring destruction when unprepared, Machiavelli suggests that rulers with *virtù* must anticipate changes, build strong foundations, and act boldly to withstand unforeseen challenges. By being proactive rather than passive, a ruler can mitigate the influence of fortune, seizing opportunities and maintaining control even in uncertain times.

### **The Idea of Lion and Fox**

In *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli uses the metaphor of the lion and the fox to illustrate the qualities a ruler should possess to maintain power and navigate the complexities of political life. When he writes in *The Prince* that a ruler must emulate the lion and the fox, Machiavelli means that great leaders are willing to use both force and cunning to get what they want. Throughout his tract, Machiavelli alternates between advocating a leonine and a fox-like style of leadership. He urges rulers to act with the ferocity and determination of a lion, yet he also encourages rulers to take a more thoughtful, flexible approach to statecraft. By introducing the metaphor of the lion and the fox, Machiavelli makes concrete an idea that appears and reappears throughout his writing, that is, successful princes are both decisive warriors and subtle thinkers.

In the words of Machiavelli, “one must be a fox in order to recognize traps and a lion to frighten off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid.” The fox, known for its cleverness and subtlety, represents the need for a ruler to be perceptive, strategic, and deceptive when necessary. In the treacherous realm of politics, traps are inevitable. These schemes, betrayals, manipulations, and unexpected turns are part of the landscape. Only a ruler who possesses the cunning of a fox can anticipate, recognize, and avoid such dangers. This ability to foresee threats and act preemptively is critical in maintaining power and outmaneuvering rivals. The fox is not overtly aggressive, but it is observant and calculating. For Machiavelli, a successful leader must be intellectually agile and capable of using guile to preserve authority and neutralize opposition.

On the other hand, the lion symbolizes strength, courage, and the capacity to impose one's will. A lion instills fear and commands respect. In the political context, this translates to the capacity to wield power decisively and assert dominance when required. A ruler must sometimes employ force to suppress dissent, deter enemies, and maintain order. However, Machiavelli warns that relying solely on brute force makes a ruler predictable and vulnerable. Pure strength without cunning is insufficient, as even the most powerful ruler can fall victim to traps set by more cunning adversaries.

The wisdom in Machiavelli's statement lies in his assertion that a ruler who “simply acts like a lion is stupid.” Such a leader lacks the foresight and adaptability necessary to navigate the complexities of human nature and political intrigue. Strength alone is not

enough in a world where appearances often matter more than reality, and where allies can become enemies overnight. An unthinking reliance on force may win short-term obedience, but it can also breed resistance, resentment, and rebellion. Conversely, a purely cunning leader who lacks the strength to enforce decisions may be seen as weak and easily overthrown. Thus, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of blending the two approaches – a ruler must know when to be the fox and when to be the lion, and more importantly, when to switch between them.

In summary, the lion and the fox in *The Prince* symbolize the dual qualities necessary for effective leadership: the brute strength of the lion and the strategic cunning of the fox. The lion-fox pairing reminds us that politicians should possess equal measures of cleverness and brute strength. Machiavelli presents Achilles as an ideal leader, a literary figure who was tutored by Chiron the Centaur and so ruled with the intelligence of a man and the instincts of a beast.

Like a lion, Achilles could get past the “wolves” he encountered on the battlefield, but like a fox, he could also get past the subtler snares of rival politicians. Lions are associated with nobility and straightforwardness; but Machiavelli points out that an effective governor must occasionally lie and commit sins of omission. Like Pope Alexander VI, great men will deceive their followers if the deception is in the followers' best interests. Thus, Machiavelli's prince combines boldness and sly wordplay, force and diplomacy. A wise ruler must learn to balance these traits to maintain control over his state. This intricate balancing emphasizes the importance of adapting to harsh realities and making tough decisions to maintain power.

### **The End Justifies the Means**

The Phrase, “end justifies the means,” while not explicitly stated by Machiavelli, remains the high point of his political philosophy, and this maxim is solely responsible for the controversies associated with *The Prince*. In fact, it is in this regard that many vilified and called Machiavelli a devil for removing traditional moral considerations in matters of politics. He explored the complexities of power, governance, and morality, providing an unconventional discussion of how rulers can effectively maintain control and achieve their objectives. Even though the exact phrase does not appear in Machiavelli's writings, the sentiment reflects his belief that outcomes, particularly in political contexts, often overshadow the ethical implications of the action taken to achieve them.

Probably the closest Machiavelli gets to expressing this view is in Chapter 8 of *The Prince*; “Cruelty well used (if one may speak well of evil) is when it is employed once for all, and one is led to it by necessity to ensure one's power, and when afterwards it is not persisted in, but is converted into the greatest possible benefit for the subjects.” In **this Chapter** of *The Prince*, Machiavelli discusses the strategic use of cruelty, arguing that if used wisely and decisively, it can serve to establish and maintain power. He differentiates between **necessary cruelty**, which is employed swiftly and effectively to secure authority, and **unnecessary cruelty**, which is prolonged and excessive, leading to hatred and instability.

His analysis is centered on the idea that a ruler must sometimes commit harsh acts for the greater good of the state, thereby embodying the principle that “the end justifies the means.”

For instance, the economy of Ghana is effective today and socio-economic development attained because her former President, Jerry Rawlings, undertook a political purge that amounted to a house cleaning which in effect was aimed at a good end by executing those behind the economic woes of the country and today, the country is better off as the citizens are reaping the benefits of the huge sacrifice undertaken by Rawlings to attain their full potentials. This action, in the traditional moral sense, is immoral; but on the other hand, desirable. What is more, its end result translates to a good that brings about a positive improvement in the lives of the citizens. Hence, the end justifies it.

The phrase “**the end justifies the means**” is closely linked to **consequentialism**, a moral philosophy that evaluates actions based on their outcomes rather than their intrinsic nature. Consequentialism asserts that the morality of an action is determined by its consequences, aligning directly with Niccolò Machiavelli's political philosophy in *The Prince*. From a consequentialist standpoint, Machiavelli's principle can be understood as a form of **political utilitarianism**, where the well-being of the state outweighs individual moral concerns. If an act of deception, violence, or cruelty ensures stability and prosperity, then it is deemed justified.

### **Politics-Morality Paradox in Machiavelli's Philosophy**

Niccolò Machiavelli remains one of Western most controversial and influential political thinkers. His name has become synonymous with cunning, manipulation, and ruthless political strategy. However, beneath this reputation lies a profound and complex paradox at the heart of his philosophy: the politics-morality paradox. This paradox refers to the apparent contradiction between Machiavelli's advocacy for pragmatic, often morally questionable political actions, and the traditional expectation that political leadership should align with moral or ethical standards.

Machiavelli's critique of Christian morality is central to this paradox. He believed that Christian virtues like meekness, forgiveness, and self-denial had weakened political life in Italy, rendering leaders ineffective in the face of foreign invasion and internal instability. By contrast, he admired the Roman Republic's secular virtues such as strength, discipline, and patriotism, which, he believed, fostered civic greatness. In Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, he states, “Those things which seem to be virtues, if followed, may lead to one's ruin; while those things which appear to be vices may result in one's safety and well-being.” Thus, Machiavelli reverses the conventional moral judgment by suggesting that immoral actions can lead to morally desirable ends, such as peace, order, and national strength.

Machiavelli's ideas have been widely criticized for their apparent disregard for morality. Critics argue that his philosophy promotes tyranny and justifies unethical behavior. The

idea that "the end justifies the means" can be dangerous if misapplied, leading to oppression and authoritarian rule. However, defenders of Machiavelli argue that he was not advocating for cruelty but rather recognizing the harsh realities of politics and providing practical advice for rulers in unstable times.

However, the politics-morality paradox in Machiavelli's philosophy raises several important questions. Can political leaders afford to be moral in an immoral world? Is it possible to govern effectively without resorting to questionable means? Machiavelli's answer is a cautious no. He urges rulers to appear moral, because reputation matters, but to act immorally when necessary. Thus, he draws a sharp line between public appearance and private reality—a distinction that continues to resonate in modern political discourse.

### **Machiavelli's Approach to Democracy**

Many who only encounter Machiavelli through *The Prince* often assume he advocates authoritarianism. While *The Prince* is his most famous work, it represents only a fragment of his political thought. Machiavelli states early in *The Prince* that he will focus solely on principalities, excluding republics about which he claims to have written extensively elsewhere. That "elsewhere" is *The Discourses on the Ten Books of Titus Livy*, a lesser-known but essential companion piece for understanding Machiavelli's broader political philosophy. Unlike *The Prince*, which focuses on strategies for consolidating and maintaining power in monarchical or autocratic systems, *The Discourses* is where Machiavelli more candidly expresses his republican ideals.

In *The Discourses*, he explains that republics are free states different from principalities, which are not free states. The republics rank higher in their organization and structuring than the principalities. Only people with higher *virtu* can form a true republic. This is because it implies a constitution, a self-government (not merely representative democracy), unlike principality where a prince or tyrant must subjugate the people because they lack *virtu* and cannot govern themselves. In the republics, the people have the freedom to rule themselves. The people, according to Machiavelli, are more prudent and stable than the princes. The people can judge better; external forces of corrupt judgment influence them less than the princes. In their election, they make better choices than princes who would be easily lured to choose dubious characters.

Even on the question of law, although the prince could make better laws, institutions, statutes, etc., the people would keep them better. Thus, the *virtu* of a good people is always higher than that of the prince. They are free. It is freedom, according to Machiavelli, that makes a state a republic. It is the *virtu* of the people that make them free. Although both *The Prince* and *The Discourses* share common terminology and draw from similar philosophical roots, *The Discourses* often leads to conclusions that differ, sometimes even contradict, those of *The Prince*. For instance, in *The Discourses*, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of **citizen involvement** in governance. Machiavelli wrote that **liberty**

**(vivere libero)** is best preserved when power is shared and the people actively participate in politics. He praises the Roman Republic for allowing the **people (plebeians)** to have a voice in laws and leadership. This aligns with democratic ideals of **popular sovereignty** and **representative government**, where people elect leaders or participate directly in decision-making.

Another characteristic that differentiates the republics from the principalities is that of the “common good.” The common good is only respected in the republics not in the principalities because the prince is prone to protect the private interest of the few when it conflicts with that of the generality of the people. And this always makes the principalities less prosperous in wealth and power. In Machiavelli's own words, “it is not the individual prosperity, but the general good that makes cities great; and certainly, the general good is regarded nowhere but in the republics.”

Machiavelli recognizes the accounts others have given about forms of government. Three forms have been recognized, namely: principality, aristocracy, and democracy. Some would rather say that there are six different kinds of government, that is; three are bad, while three are good in themselves. In this respect, the three good ones mentioned are principality, aristocracy, and democracy. The bad ones come about when the so-called good ones turn into their counterparts: “A principality can turn into chaos, an aristocracy state a government of the few (oligarchy), and a democracy can easily turn into chaos. Thus, if the founder of a republic institutes one of these kinds of government, he cannot hope for it to last long, for no precaution can keep it from lapsing into its opposite because of the similarity in the case between virtue and vice.

The core of Machiavelli's claim is that **no pure form of government is immune to corruption or decay**. Each system carries within it the seeds of its own destruction, as the very characteristics that sustain it in virtuous times become the tools of vice in more degenerate times. Thus, a principality, though perhaps efficient in maintaining order, can devolve into arbitrary rule if the prince loses his sense of justice. An aristocracy may initially be a group of wise and experienced leaders, but without accountability, it risks becoming self-serving and disconnected from the people. Similarly, democracy, while empowering the masses, may fall prey to populism, disorder, and the erosion of institutions. This understanding leads Machiavelli to advocate not for a single ideal form of government, but for a **mixed constitution**, a political system that balances the strengths and weaknesses of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. For him, the Roman Republic represents the pinnacle of such a system, combining the authority of consuls (monarchical element), the wisdom of the Senate (aristocratic element), and the voice of the people (democratic element). This balance creates a system of internal checks that can prevent the rapid decay of any one part of the government.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Machiavelli's political philosophy represents a turning point in the history of

Western political thought. This work has been able to demonstrate Machiavelli's political thought and how his environment shaped his political thoughts. Little did he know that his work would spark both political and philosophical debates. His works shifted the focus of politics away from abstract ideals and moral virtues to the realities of power, governance, and human behavior. By emphasizing the necessity of cunning, adaptability, and strength, he provided rulers with strategies for survival and stability in a world marked by uncertainty and conflict. At the same time, his reflections on democracy and the republican ideal demonstrate that his concerns extended beyond sheer power to the enduring quest for civic liberty and the common good.

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