

Machiavelli and his Relevance to the Contemporary Politics

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Abstract

Niccol Machiavelli, a well-known political philosopher from the Italian Renaissance, is still regarded as important in the fields of political science, philosophy, and history. His writings, especially "The Prince" and "Discourses on Livy," have generated a great deal of discussion and analysis throughout the years. This extensive research paper goes into the biography of Machiavelli, analyses his key writings, explores the central ideas and themes of his political philosophy, and assesses his lasting influence on contemporary politics and administration. This paper provides a thorough grasp of Machiavelli's ideas and their applicability to modern political discourse by fusing historical settings, primary sources, and academic interpretations.

Keywords

Florentine; Discourses; Ethics; Virtue; Morality; Paganism; Realpolitik

Introduction

A prominent figure in political philosophy and Renaissance political thinking, Niccol Machiavelli, has had a profound impact on the fields of politics, administration, and leadership. His landmark writings, "The Prince" and "Discourses on Livy," have enthralled academics and leaders of governments for ages as well as prompted heated discussions and varying interpretations. This research paper, written by a first-year master's student in political science, aims to delve into the life of Machiavelli, study the core ideas and topics of his political philosophy, look at his significant writings, and assess how he continues to influence contemporary politics and governance.

The formative years of Machiavelli's political career were a time of unrest in Florentine history. He started working for the government as a clerk in the Second Chancery of the Republic in 1498. He rose through the ranks throughout time and eventually held the important position of Second Chancellor in the Florentine administration. He was able to observe the inner workings of political management and decision-making at this time.

Machiavelli served as a diplomat for Florence on several diplomatic missions to represent Florence's interests abroad. He famously made court visits to France, Spain, and the Holy

Roman Empire. He gained a deeper understanding of international relations and statecraft as a result of these experiences, which exposed him to various political structures, leaders, and foreign policies.

When the Medici dynasty returned to power in Florence in 1512, Machiavelli's political fortunes turned for the worst. Due to Machiavelli's republican leanings, the Medici, who had been exiled during the brief Florentine Republic, eyed him suspiciously. As a result, Machiavelli lost his government job and spent some time in jail. After being banished from active politics, his life underwent a change that opened the door for his writing career. The examination of "The Prince," perhaps Machiavelli's most famous work, is the main focus of this research article. By analyzing this monumental work, we will investigate the practical and unconventional counsel Machiavelli provided to rulers on how to gain, preserve, and increase political power. The study will dive into the core ideas of "The Prince," including the interplay of fortune and virtue, the art of war and diplomacy, and the delicate balance between fear and love in leadership.

Additionally, this study will go beyond only "The Prince," delving thoroughly into Machiavelli's "Discusses on Livy," where he outlined his republican principles. His appreciation for the political structures of ancient Rome is shown in this lesser-known work, as is his conviction that public engagement is important and civic virtue for the stability of a state. Moral and ethical debates have long surrounded Machiavelli's political ideas. He is frequently accused by detractors of supporting immoral and brutal political behavior. In addition to addressing these ethical issues, this research paper will look at the various interpretations that have developed over time, ranging from the perception of Machiavelli as an evil supporter of tyranny to the perception of him as a realist political theorist interested in the survival and growth of the state.

The Prince

Machiavelli is seen as a teacher of evil in the earliest and most pervasive opinion. Leo Strauss (1899–1973), a German-born American philosopher, starts his analysis here. The Prince follows in the tradition of the "Mirror for Princes"—books of guidance that allowed princes to see themselves as though reflected in a mirror—which started with the *Cyropaedia* by the Greek historian Xenophon (431-350 BC) and persisted throughout the Middle Ages. The writings in this genre that came before Machiavelli encouraged princes to take the best prince as an example. However, Machiavelli's version advises a prince to follow the "effectual truth" of things rather than the standard of "what should be done" lest he bring about his own ruin. Princes must learn how not to be good and use or not use this knowledge "according to necessity."

Principalities can be either obtained or inherited, according to Machiavelli. In general, he contends that the harder it is to seize power over a state, the simpler it is to maintain it. As a result, the new prince, who relies on "a dread of punishment that never forsakes you," will prevail, while a prince who expects his subjects to follow their promises of support will be let down. This is because the fear of a new prince is stronger than the love for a hereditary prince. The prince will discover that while "each wants to die for him when death is at a distance," when the prince needs his subjects to act as promised, they typically refuse. The moral of the story is that every prince, whether young or old, must see himself as a fresh prince and learn to rely on "one's arms," both physically by building one's army and figuratively by not depending on the kindness of others.

The new prince relies on his virtue, but if virtue is to help him win a state, it must take on a new meaning that is different from the virtue of seeking peace in the New Testament. According to Machiavelli's definition of virtue, the prince must prioritise the art of war and pursue not only security but also glory because necessity includes grandeur. Machiavelli defined virtue as being done for the reputation that it helps monarchs build, not for its own sake. For instance, generosity doesn't help a prince because the beneficiaries might not be appreciative and extravagant displays require taxing the prince's subjects, who will resent him for it. A prince should therefore not be concerned if people think he is stingy because this fault gives him the ability to control. A prince should also not worry if his harshness is perceived as such as long as it is "well used." In a famous passage about Agathocles (361-289 BC), the self-proclaimed king of Sicily, who Machiavelli calls a "most excellent captain" but who rose to power through dishonest means, he also employs virtù in the classical sense. Machiavelli says of Agathocles, "One cannot call it a virtue to kill one's citizens, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, and religion. However, he mentions "the virtue of Agathocles," who carried out all of these actions, in the very next sentence. Machiavelli claimed that virtue tries to lessen fortune's influence over human affairs since fortune prevents men from relying on themselves. Machiavelli first acknowledges that fortune controls half of the men's lives, but in a famous metaphor, he compares fortune to a lady who is more easily gained by the bold and the young, "who commands her with more audacity," than by those who move gently. Machiavelli cannot simply reject or supplant the conventional idea of moral virtue, which draws its support from common people's religious convictions. His moral virtue of mastery utilizes and coexists alongside traditional moral virtue. A prince with the quality of mastery may, to some extent, control fortune and people.

A passionate "exhortation to seize Italy and to free her from the barbarians"—apparently France and Spain, which had been encroaching on the divided peninsula—is written by Machiavelli in the final chapter of *The Prince*. He exhorts for a savior, alluding to the wonders performed as Moses led the Israelites to the land of promise, and concludes with a line from a nationalistic poem by Petrarch (1304–74). Many people now view Machiavelli

as a patriot rather than as an uninterested scientist, thanks to the final chapter, which has led to a third interpretation.

The Discourses on Livy

The Discourses on Livy allow for multiple readings, just as in *The Prince*. One theory emphasizes the republicanism of the work and places Machiavelli in a republican tradition that goes back to Aristotle (384–322 BC), continues through the organization of medieval city-states, the revival of classical political philosophy in Renaissance humanism, and the founding of the modern American republic. This theory was developed separately in works by the political theorists J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner in the 1970s. This interpretation is centered on Machiavelli's several pro-republican statements, such as his claim that the crowd is wiser and more reliable than a prince and his emphasis in the Discourses on Livy on the republican virtue of self-sacrifice as a means of battling corruption. However, Machiavelli's republicanism does not rest on the traditional republican tenet that "power is safer in the hands of many than it is in the hands of one." Instead, he claims that in order to find or reform a republic, one must "be alone." Since any order must depend on a single mind, Romulus "deserves excuse" for murdering Remus, his brother, and co-founder of Rome, because it was for the common good. The kind of leaders that Machiavelli outlines in *The Prince* is what republics require. These so-called "princes in a republic" are unable to rule in accordance with justice because those who receive what is due to them feel no need to do so. Those that are abandoned also do not feel appreciative. So, in a republic, a prince will not have any "partisan friends" unless he learns "to kill the sons of Brutus," using violence to humiliate republican foes and, incidentally, himself. A decent man is necessary to clean up a corrupt state, but a bad man is necessary to become a prince. Machiavelli asserts that wicked men nearly never gain power and that good persons virtually never utilize power for good. The people must be convinced to return to their original virtue through sensational executions that serve as a reminder of punishment and rekindle their terror, however, republics degenerate when the populace loses the fear that compels them to obey. Allowing evil characters to earn notoriety through deeds that have a positive effect, if not a positive motive, seems to be the obvious solution to the dilemma.

Machiavelli criticizes his contemporaries for turning to ancient jurists for political advice rather than to the real history of Rome in the Discourses on Livy, where he favors the actions of the ancients over their philosophy. He contends that the Roman Republic's factional strife—which was denounced by numerous ancient writers—made Rome free and powerful.

Machiavelli was also critical of the Renaissance, particularly for the humanism it acquired from Plato, Aristotle, and the Roman orator Cicero (106-43 BC), even though he was a product of it and is frequently represented as its major exponent (e.g., by 19th-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt). He compared himself to the early explorers of uncharted places and advocated for "new modes and orders." In search of the underlying sources of politics in fraud and conspiracy, which he addressed with seeming delight, his concentration on the effective truth led him. It is noteworthy that the longest chapters in both *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy* are about conspiracy.

In his two major writings, Machiavelli views the gap between the ancients and the moderns—the ancients are strong and weak—as the essence of politics. In three different locations in the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli aggressively and impudently criticises both the Roman Catholic church and Christianity itself, arguing that the moderns are weak because they were shaped by Christianity. The clergy are dishonest and mislead people into thinking "that it is evil to say evil of evil"; Christianity exalts suffering and debases humanity, in Machiavelli's view, making it the root of Italy's division. However, Machiavelli does not specify whether he favours a reformation of Christianity, paganism, or atheism in a letter he wrote two months before his passing on April 16, 1527: "I love my fatherland more than my soul."

In conclusion, "The Prince" and "Discussions on Livy" are fundamental works that perfectly capture the depth and complexity of Machiavelli's political philosophy. "Discourses on Livy" delves into republican principles, civic virtue, and the benefits of mixed governance, whereas "The Prince" concentrates on the practical tactics of rulers and the desire for power. Together, these pieces illuminate the complexities and inconsistencies of Machiavelli's political theory and offer insightful analyses of the theoretical and historical underpinnings of his theories. Analyzing these significant works is crucial for understanding the development of political thinking and their continuing relevance in modern politics as a first-year master's student of political science.

Moral and Ethical Controversies in Machiavelli's Political Thought

The moral and ethical ramifications of Niccol Machiavelli's political philosophy, especially in "The Prince," are one of the most divisive topics. The discussion in this area of the research paper will focus on the moral and ethical issues raised by Machiavelli's theories as well as how his realistic approach to politics has generated a lot of controversy throughout the years.

Amorality and Disruptive Ethics: Machiavelli's counsel to kings in "The Prince" is frequently seen as supporting an amorality where the ends justify the methods. Critics claim that his strategy appears to support lying, manipulating, and even using violence to

advance political objectives. Moral repugnance and criticism of his support for behaviors like betrayal, cruelty, and the use of fear to preserve power have been expressed.

Separation of Politics and Morality: One of the main points of contention is Machiavelli's division of politics and ethics. He argues that politics takes place in a sphere apart from moral considerations and that rulers must put the survival of the state and the welfare of their people before rigidly upholding traditional moral norms. This viewpoint opposes conventional ideas of ethics that promote moral and upright leadership.

Realism versus Idealism: Machiavelli's realist approach to politics, emphasizing the world's harsh realities, stands in contrast to idealist political theories that propose normative ethical frameworks for governance. His concentration on practicalities and rejection of idealism, according to detractors, undercut ethical considerations and provide a potentially perilous perception of political power.

The Machiavellian Label: "Machiavellian" has come to mean slyness, duplicity, and manipulation. The reputation of Machiavelli and his theories have suffered because of this association with unethical behavior. According to detractors, calling someone or a policy "Machiavellian" implies a contempt for moral standards and a willingness to forgo moral ideals in favor of self-interest.

Contextual Interpretation: Supporters of Machiavelli's political philosophy contend that his writings must be read in the context of the time in which he lived, both historically and politically. They contend that a practical and realistic approach to governing was necessary given the unstable and hazardous political environment of Renaissance Italy. Furthermore, they contend that Machiavelli's goals were to guide rulers through challenging circumstances rather than to establish a clear ethical code.

The Question of Satire: Some academics have hypothesized that "The Prince" may be satirical literature, written to expose the misdeeds of kings rather than to further Machiavellian ideas. This theory holds that Machiavelli may have used irony and sarcasm to highlight the flaws of rulers who utilised unethical tactics to hold onto power.

Impact on Modern Politics: Machiavelli's views continue to be relevant in modern politics, which prompts ethical concerns regarding the proper use of power in government. His writings have affected politicians, strategists, and decision-makers, sparking discussions about the moral limits of political decision-making and the ramifications of applying Machiavellian concepts to contemporary government.

In conclusion, there has been a lengthy scholarly and popular discussion of the moral and ethical difficulties surrounding Machiavelli's political ideas. The name "Machiavellian" has endured because of the impressionable amorality and unusual ethics in "The Prince," as

well as his practical approach to politics. Defenders of his writings argue for a contextual reading that takes into account the historical context and practical goals of his writings, while detractors condemn his ideas for undermining conventional ethical ideals. Understanding the complexity of Machiavelli's political theory and its broader implications for ethical considerations in politics and administration requires a thorough analysis of these controversies.

Machiavelli in Modern Politics

"The Prince," a political book by Niccolo Machiavelli that was written during the Renaissance, has had a significant impact on contemporary politics. His pragmatic realism and outspoken political style have endured the test of time, influencing the tactics of modern politicians all across the world. According to the political philosophy, the Machiavellian leader combines fortuna (the element of chance) with virtù (strength, cunning, and adaptability), making difficult judgements to ensure the welfare of the state. In the field of international relations, his demand for leaders to put reality ahead of idealism has resonance. States frequently put their own interests first when pursuing their national goals, and morality occasionally takes a backseat. This strategy, known as realpolitik, is in line with Machiavelli's ideas and urges leaders to put the stability and security of the state first, even if that necessitates using harsh measures.

Intense discussion has surrounded Machiavelli's philosophy's separation of politics and ethics. He contends that political imperatives must be followed by leaders, even if it means sacrificing moral principles. This component of his philosophy now presents a challenge to modern leaders who must resolve difficult moral conundrums while making choices that affect the welfare of their countries. Machiavelli has had a significant impact on political strategy. His emphasis on cunning and the practical application of power has influenced both leaders' and strategists' strategies. Machiavellian ideas have served as an inspiration for political realists like Henry Kissinger, who promote an emphasis on the balance of power and practical diplomacy. The art of navigating political landscapes denoted by "Machiavellian intelligence" has come to be equated with this skill.

Along with "The Prince," Machiavelli's book on military tactics, "The Art of War," also had a significant influence on contemporary conflict and military doctrine. His ideas about trickery, adaptability, and flexibility have been incorporated into military doctrines and are demonstrated in the tactics used in World War II and other conflicts. Modern globalization has created fresh Machiavellian conundrums. Leaders struggle with challenging concerns like managing foreign alliances, counterterrorism, and humanitarian initiatives. Decision-making is still governed by Machiavellian ideas as leaders attempt to protect national interests among complex geopolitical issues.

In conclusion, Niccolo Machiavelli has had a significant impact on contemporary politics. Political philosophy has been profoundly influenced by his pragmatic realism, emphasis on leadership characteristics, and willingness to question accepted ethical norms. The ageless wisdom from "The Prince" is still a beacon for today's statecraft, with resonance in its complicated complexity. The wisdom of Machiavelli's masterpiece persists, offering priceless lessons for those tasked with overseeing nations as leaders negotiate the ever-changing political terrain.

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