Machiavellian Politics In The Prince Essay, Research Paper

The Prince, written by Niccolo Machiavelli, is one of the

first examinations of politics and science from a purely scientific

and rational perspective. Machiavelli theorizes that the state is only

created if the people cooperate and work to maintain it. The state is

also one of man?s greatest endeavors, and the state takes precedence

over everything else. The state should be one?s primary focus, and

maintaining the sovereignty of the state one?s most vital concern. The

state is founded on the power of its military. Therefore, a strong

military is vital to maintaining the state. Machiavelli believes that

men respect power, but they will take advantage of kindness. He

believes that when given the opportunity one must destroy completely,

because if one does not he will certainly be destroyed. The prince

should lead the military, and he has to be intelligent. An effective

politician can make quick and intelligent choices about the problems

that constantly arise before him. He must also have virtue, which

means he is strong, confident, talented, as well as smart. A prince

cannot be uncertain, because uncertainty is a sign of weakness.

Fortune controls half of human?s actions, and man?s will control the

other half. Virtue is the best defense for fortune, and virtue must be

used in order to keep fortune in check. The prince must take advantage

of situations based solely on if it is best for the state. He should

choose his decisions based on contemporary and historical examples. A

prince cannot consider whether his acts are moral or immoral, and he

instead must act in an unbiased manner for the state. Also, it does

not matter how the state achieves its goals, as long as these goals

are achieved. Finally, regardless of the personal morality involved,

the prince should be praised if he does good for the state and berated

if he hurts the state. Machiavelli?s principles have widespread

influence, and they are quite similar to some of Thomas Hobbes ideas

in Leviathan.

Machiavelli has a very low opinion of the people throughout

history. In general, he feels that men are “ungrateful, fickle,

liars, and deceiver.” “They shun danger and are greedy for profit;

while you treat them well, they are yours. They would shed their blood

for you ? but when you are in danger they turn against you.”

Machiavelli basically has little respect for the people, and he feels

as though they have not earned much either. He uses this as

justification for the use of fear in order to control people. He also

feels that men are “wretched creatures who would not keep their word

to you, you need not keep your word to them.” This sense of fairness

justifies breaking one?s word to men. Machiavelli also writes about

how hard it must be for a prince to stay virtuous. He concludes that

with so many wretched men around virtue is hard to create in oneself.

“The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way

necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous.”

Overall, Machiavelli is very pessimistic about the abilities of the

people. He feels that after examining people through history, his

conclusions of wretched men are correct.

Machiavelli tells us that the sovereign must take whatever

action is necessary to maintain order in society. In time this will

result in the most compassionate choice too. Machiavelli explains

that, Cesare Borgia, by using cruelty was able to achieve order and

obedience in Romangna. This contrast with the inaction of the

Florentines, who allowed internal conflict to develop in Pistoia,

resulting in devastation of the city. Therefore, a number of highly

visible executions can be a very effective means of controlling the

people and in preventing a major out break of violence and murder.

Machiavelli also cites the tremendous military successes of Hannibal.

Even though Hannibal led an army of different races over foreign soil,

he never had any dissension because of his reputation of extreme

cruelty. Machiavelli further concludes that it is difficult to be

loved and feared simultaneously. Hence, one should always prefer to be

feared than to be loved. During adverse times, the fear of punishment

is far more effective in maintaining control than depending people?s

goodwill and love. Finally, excessive leniency will lead to ruin,

because leniency is seen as a sign of weakness. A good historical

example was when Scipio?s armies mutinied against him in Spain.

Machiavelli talks consistently about the Roman empire and its

rulers. Particularly, he stresses the importance of having a strong

army and popular support by the army and people. The Roman emperors

proved to us many times that a ruler who is perceived to be weak is

the most vulnerable to attack. Alexander Severus was controlled by his

mother and considered feminine by his troops. He was a good ruler, but

it was this appearance of weakness that led his troops to kill him.

Antonius Caracalla is another example of an erroneous ruler. He was a

very strong military leader who was a great fighter. Unfortunately, he

became an incredibly cruel and harsh ruler over time, and he was hence

killed by a centurion. Machiavelli also includes the country of Italy

into much of his writings. He hopes to reclaim the land which has been

taken away from them. He feels that Italian princes have lost their

states because they have not had armed people. Machiavelli tells us

that an “armed population is a stable population”. The Italian princes

also have not acted quickly, like a real prince should act. Julius II

did act quick, and Machiavelli attributes this to his success. In

reality, the whole purpose behind Machiavelli writing The Prince was

to try and help Italy free itself from foreign domination.

The Prince has been an incredibly important book. It was written

in the 1500?s, but much of it still applies today. The book also has

influenced many people in history. Many philosophers credit

Machiavelli with leading the way in political science. They say this

because he was the first person to take a rational approach at

analyzing government and politics. Many of Machiavelli?s critics would

say that he is to harsh in his ideas, and that he even seems immoral.

The truth is Machiavelli is only being honest with what he has

observed consistently in history to be true. The effect of his writing

are still found today too. People still need virtue in order to be a

good ruler or manager. Success is still to those who can make quick

and intelligent choices. The government is still supported most by it

amount of power. However, countries are held accountable today, and

few would agree that the end justifies the means as Machiavelli wrote.

Overall, Machiavelli?s work has lasted through the years, and it has

proven to be a classic piece of literature by standing the test of

time.