MACHIAVELLI’S *THE PRINCE*: AN OPINIONATED BOOK REVIEW AND ANALYSIS REGARDING HIS POLITICAL VIEWS

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*The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli is written in an interesting and unique manner because the author is offering his gift of knowledge on successful rule, instead of valued materialistic gifts, to future leaders and princes. His composed knowledge sets the mood for an effective piece that will prove useful for years to come. The success of *The Prince* is due to Machiavelli’s personal experience as a political leader and his review of historical political practices, subjective format and composition, and realistic views on a leader’s means for exerting and maintaining control of the people.

Machiavelli skillfully combines primary, as well as secondary, sources to achieve the full impact of his political principles. Towards the end of the book, Machiavelli states, “experience in our time shows that those princes have done great things who have valued their promises little, and who have understood how to addle the brains of men with trickery” (64). He uses his personal observations and practical experiences and supports these claims and ideas with various historical examples of leaders who grew from using his principals, or who fell because of unknowingly ignoring them. His knowledge and observance of the cycles of history, prompted him to use these examples for their future usefulness. He integrates the antiquities of Rome, France, Spain, and many other classical places, to document his claim. He repeatedly uses examples of Rome with numerous illustrations of the reigns of Cyrus, Caesar, Alexander, and various other rulers. In particular, he praised the inner strength and stability of the Roman Republic. For example, at the beginning of the book, Machiavelli discusses how a Prince should govern newly acquired cities or provinces. In supporting his ideas and methods, Machiavelli states, “we have examples of all these methods in the histories of the Spartans and Romans” (11). He describes how the Spartans lost Athens and Thebes by creating oligarchies, but that the Romans maintained Capua, Carthage, and Numantia by destroying them (11).

Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is arranged in a jurisprudence manner. Thus, he proposes several laws and regulations that, if heeded, could lead to a
long, successful, and prosperous reign. In the text, Machiavelli’s laws are to “be deceitful and cunning in dealing with rivals; do as people actually do rather than as they ought to do...” (428). His twenty-six laws and regulations range from initially acquiring a Princedom, to management of armies and defensive rule, to the use of cruelty, clemency, and even latteny in achieving whatever is desired. Machiavelli amplifies his ideas with colorful support from various historical reigns contributing to his use of secondary sources. For example, in the section titled, “Of Mixed Princedoms,” Machiavelli describes how to successfully acquire a new state. It is in this section that he writes about the importance of the Prince’s motivation, commonalty of language, annihilation of the other Prince’s bloodline, and stable tax/law regulation (3). Additionally, he stresses that it is important for the prince to destroy ancient blood lines and live in the new princedom. He then exemplifies these points with the Turks and the Greeks. In the midst of the book, Machiavelli addresses the issue of “cruelty and clemency.” In remembrance of Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli suggests that it is better to be cruel: “Cesare Borgia was reputed cruel, yet his cruelty restored Romagna, united it, and brought it to order and obedience” (43). Overall, Machiavelli’s principles include: the supreme power of prince and state, avoidance of neutrality, ability to instill fear, keeping faith and obedience of the people, and diverting the people’s attention from internal difficulties.

Machiavelli’s epistemological means for acquiring a realistic view on a leader’s way of exerting and maintaining control of the people is most likely due to his political experience. In particular, Machiavelli’s first-hand governmental experience results from him being in the political arena for fourteen years as Secretary of The Council of Ten (428). Thus, his political, historical, and theoretical views on human behavior, also contribute to the book’s effectiveness. Although its scandalous content prevented availability to the public during Machiavelli’s lifetime, the provocative nature of this book later catapulted it to new heights. This scandal centered around Machiavelli’s do-or-die honesty regarding the Prince’s rule. One such attitude is “keeping faith by law or force.” He illustrates this attitude by relating it to past Princes being trained by Chiron the Centaur, who was half man and half beast and, thus, capable of using “both natures.” Because, according to Machiavelli, “it is necessary for a Prince to know how to use both natures, and that the one without the other has not stability” (45). Though his point of view and means of maintaining control seems cruel, his ideas are effective in creating a “how-to” manual for Princes.

This manual is created in the harsh realism and stereotypical power structures seen in many political forms even to this day. In pointing out this realism, the text stresses that The Prince is a “theoretical brilliance that has earned Machiavelli a reputation as the founder on modern politi-
cal science” (428). His work not only proves useful in the reciprocity of historical politics, but is rather enlightening on such issues as the psychology of people and the social learning and humanistic approaches to understanding other individuals. As a psychology major, I thought Machiavelli's means and skill of manipulating individuals to be quite fascinating, especially at the time in which it was composed.

Works Cited
