

Ethics of Leadership

Pragmatic Virtues for Leadership

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince* (PDF on webpage).

Background

In marked contrast to Aristotle's virtues of character excellence and the moral virtues of the subsequent Christian tradition, Niccoló Machiavelli defends what he claims is a more pragmatic and realistic account of the types of virtues necessary for a leader to maintain power. Like Thomas Hobbes, Machiavelli lived through civil war and so saw the need for a strong leader. Machiavelli also shares Hobbes' assumptions of psychological egoism. In this context, Machiavelli suggests that the cardinal pragmatic virtue is *appearing* to be morally virtuous while *in reality* doing whatever is necessary—moral or immoral—to maintain power. While Machiavelli is traditionally interpreted as defending egoism, this is an unnecessarily narrow understanding. For instance, a leader possessing the Aristotlean virtues of character excellence and wisdom could still be concerned about losing power to a ruthless tyrant. That is, this leader wants to continue governing virtuously, yet must defend herself from a tyrant who has no qualms about lying and cheating his way into power. To a leader in such circumstances, Machiavelli's advice for retaining power may resonate loud and clear.

Questions

1. In Chapter XV, Niccoló Machiavelli suggests that he is going to avoid an idealistic account of leadership and instead be realistic. Why does he claim to want to do this? On this account, what is the ultimate criterion for pragmatic and prudent leadership? In other words, what principle or standard should a leader should use when deciding whether to act according to moral virtue or according to vice? (Hint: Machiavelli presents the criterion and its rationale in the final paragraph of Chapter XV.) Do you agree with this criterion?
2. When it comes to Machiavelli's pragmatic virtues for leadership, should a leader be
 - Generous or miserly (Chapter XVI)?
 - Merciful or cruel (Chapter XVII)?
 - Loved or feared (Chapter XVII)?
 - Trustworthy or treacherous (Chapter XVIII)?

How does Machiavelli's answer to these questions employ his criterion for pragmatic and prudential leadership?

3. Throughout this reading, and especially in Chapters XVIII and XIX, Machiavelli repeatedly defends the claim that a ruler need not actually possess moral virtue "but he must certainly seem to" (p. 62). What reasons does Machiavelli give to defend his advocacy of (what we today call) impression management? How does this argument employ his criterion for pragmatic and prudential leadership? Do you find this argument persuasive?