

# POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

## Prudent & Pragmatic Leadership

### Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

### Reading

Machiavelli, N. (2010, August). *The Prince* (J. Bennett, Trans.).

Early Modern Texts. Retrieved November 20, 2018, from <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/machiavelli1532part2.pdf>. (Original work from 1532.)

(Excerpts are from Chapters 15, 17, and 18.)

Video: Saunders, A. C., Verheiden, M. (Writers), & Rymer, M. (Director). (2006, March 10). [Laura Roslin (Mary McDonnell) attempts to rig the presidential election in her favor]. Lay Down Your Burdens (Part 2). [Television series episode]. In R. D. Moore (Developer), *Battlestar Galactica*. NBCUniversal Television Distribution.

### Comment

The video clip is from *Battlestar Galactica*. In this show, the last remaining humans are on the run from a race of killer robots called Cylons. Laura Roslin (the older woman with glasses) is President of these survivors, and she strives to be a good and virtuous leader. Indeed, her followers—especially the head of the military (the older man with glasses talking with her at the end of the clip)—strongly respect and trust in her leadership.

However, Roslin is up for re-election, and she is about to lose to Gaius Baltar (the much younger man with long hair). Now Roslin has no evidence, but she believes 100% that Baltar is working with the Cylons. So she believes, with all her heart, that it would be really, really bad for him to become President! To that end, she has her supporters rig the election in her favor, but the head of the military finds out and confronts her about it.

Since Roslin wants to continue governing virtuously, should she be allowed to steal the election?

### Questions

1. In chapter 15, Niccolò 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?
2. Towards the end of chapter 15, after his list of 11 items, Machiavelli seems to endorse a simple rule by which a leader should decide whether to act according to the so-called “good” qualities (virtues) on that list or according to the so-called “bad” qualities (vices). I will call this rule Machiavelli's **ultimate criterion for pragmatic and prudent leadership**.  
What is this rule for choosing between virtue and vice?
3. When it comes to Machiavelli's approach to leadership, should a leader be . . .
  - Merciful or cruel (chapter 17)?
  - Loved or feared (chapter 17)?
  - Trustworthy or treacherous (chapter 18)?
 How do Machiavelli's answers to these questions employ his criterion for pragmatic and prudential leadership?
4. In chapter 18, Machiavelli defends the claim that a leader need not actually possess the so-called good qualities “but he does need to appear to have them” (p. 38).  
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?
5. Given all this, what would Machiavelli think about President Laura Roslin's attempt to steal a democratic election from her opponent Gaius Baltar?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.