

The Leadership Ethics of Machiavelli's *Prince*

Christopher E. Cosans

Christopher S. Reina

Virginia Commonwealth University

ABSTRACT: This article examines the place of Machiavelli's *Prince* in the history of ethics and the history of leadership philosophy. Close scrutiny indicates that Machiavelli advances an ethical system for leadership that involves uprooting corruption and establishing rule of law. He draws on history and current affairs in order to obtain a realistic understanding of human behavior that forms a basis for a consequentialist ethics. While he claims a good leader might do bad things, this is in situations where necessity constrains a prince to choosing the "least bad" course of action. Furthermore, Machiavelli advocates winning the goodwill of followers through leadership as a source of power. Machiavelli's leadership ethics has a sophistication not fully enjoyed by his reputation in management scholarship. He would not score as especially "Machiavellian" on the Mach IV. Many of his ideas contain seeds for theories that are now considered important for leadership today.

KEY WORDS: law, leadership, lesser of two evils, Niccolò Machiavelli, power, *The Prince*

Just as man is the best of animals when perfected, when separated from law (νόμου) and justice (δίκης) he is the worst beast.

Aristotle, *Politics*¹

If a prince who wants always to act honorably is surrounded by many unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable. Therefore, a ruler who wishes to maintain his power must learn to be not good (*non buono*) when this becomes necessary (*necessità*). I shall set aside fantasies about princes, then, and consider what happens in fact.

Machiavelli, *The Prince*²

Of all the thinkers who have written on the complications leaders face, perhaps none has had more of a talent for direct and blunt talk than Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). His words are especially pointed in his timeless classic *The Prince* (1532/1988; 1532/2013). On the surface, this work presents itself as short handbook on leadership addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici (1492-1519), who had just become the leader of the Machiavelli's city of Florence.³ However, it is unclear if Machiavelli actually thought, in reality, Lorenzo de' Medici could be the liberator of Italy, and did not instead

use the dedication to him as a literary device. Machiavelli considered monarchy to be the simplest form of government, and it could be he wrote a short handbook of how someone could be an effective prince as a more abstract study on the most elemental and simplest problems that arise in the creation of government and the establishment of leadership. *The Prince* could thus have dimensions of a thought experiment on identifying the factors involved with the emergence and maintenance of law and social order from interpersonal chaos.

In spite of its directness, some of the complexity of Machiavelli's thought on ethics was not fully understood by many. Initially after it was published in 1532, people focused on some of *The Prince's* more provocative remarks without considering the bigger picture that Machiavelli presents of moral and political complexity. Machiavelli does indeed say some shocking things. He speaks in several places of the use of cruel punishment, for example, and in one place states that in order to annex land where people speak the same language "it is enough to wipe out the family of the ruler who held sway over them" (1532/1988: 8). *The Prince* was read by most as advocating ruthless and oppressive rule, and thus dismissed by many. It was condemned by a Roman Catholic Cardinal in 1536, and all Machiavelli's books were condemned by the Papacy in 1559. Similarly, in popular culture Machiavelli was portrayed less than sympathetically by such figures as Shakespeare (Harris, 2010).

The business literature has also taken a negative view of Machiavelli's ethics as is evident by Christie and Geis' (1970) use of statements drawn from their reading of passages of *The Prince* and Machiavelli's *Discourses* to construct a psychological scale for an antisocial personality tendency they call "Machiavellianism." Their interpretation of Machiavelli has largely made its way into the mainstream management literature with the Mach IV scale. The scale consists of a series of 20 questions with which one responds on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and in which one of the extremes (1 or 5) is rated "highly Machiavellian." Three statements that illustrate their stereotypical reading of Machiavelli are:

- It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.
- The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that criminals are stupid enough to get caught.
- One should take action only when sure it is morally right.

The scale would award five points for strongly agreeing with the first two statements, and five points for strongly disagreeing with the last statement. Christie and Geis thus read Machiavelli as not having any faith in people's goodness and believing that he did not perceive anything inherently wrong with engaging in exploitation or oppression if one could get away with it.

"Machiavellianism" is included as one of the three personality traits collectively referred to as the "dark triad." Within the management literature, scholars group Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy together as the "dark triad" given all three personality traits share the common thread of malevolence demonstrated within interpersonal relationships (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). An individual displaying Machiavellianism generally exhibits three interrelated values that drive behavior:

1) an openness to using manipulation to bring about desired results, 2) a distrustful view of others, and 3) prioritizing results above morality (i.e., the ends justify the means thinking). Meta-analytic research has demonstrated that defined this way, Machiavellianism is indeed associated with lower job performance and increased displays of behaviors that are counterproductive at work (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). As such, "Machiaevellian" is far from an adjective that a modern organizational leader would want to be called.

Yet, in order to do justice to Machiavelli's thoughts on the ethics of leadership, we will argue, his remarks must be read in light of their full philosophical and historical context. To understand the vantage point from which *The Prince* speaks, we must consider the events of Renaissance Italy in which Machiavelli lived. Machiavelli is believed to have begun the first drafts of *The Prince* around July 1513, as he was living in retirement from politics at his farm. Just five months earlier he had been in prison where he was tortured for accusations of political conspiracy (Skinner & Price, 1988: xxvi). One device used on him, the *Strappado*, broke both his collar bones (Harris, 2010), and it is plausible he may have even had soreness as he wrote the very words of *The Prince*. He would have been vividly aware of how unethical humans can be. *The Prince* is thus a book dealing with the problem of evil. But unlike some of the other writings on the problem of evil (i.e., the book of Job in the Bible and Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779/1961), *The Prince* does not portray evil as some uncontrollable cosmic force.⁴ Machiavelli portrays evil as something distinctly caused by humans, and as something a leader can ameliorate if he effectively deals with the corruption and lawlessness of those whom he has power over.

A recent wave of books and articles has argued for a rejection of the traditional reading of *The Prince* as a cynical recipe book of political techniques for gaining and manipulating power, and instead calls for an interpretation of it as a book with significant pro-social dimensions (Benner, 2016; Fuller, 2016; Giorgini, 2008; Harris, 2010; Jurdjevic, 2014; Viroli, 2014). Brenner (2016) argues that Machiavelli often uses irony, and that if the text is read with care, some of its shocking passages turn out not to be prescriptions for extra-moral behavior at all. In an exploration of how the concept of tyranny appears in Machiavelli's *Prince*, where Machiavelli never mentions the word, and in *The Discourses*, where he does, Giorgini (2008) argues that throughout his work, Machiavelli places a value on liberty. Although Machiavelli at times argues it can be necessary for princes to be forceful in establishing social order, Giorgini holds that such exercises should be bound by law and the goals of helping society. According to Giorgini, Machiavelli holds that a ruler should never slip into outright oppression and that "tyranny is always evil and life under a tyrant is accordingly pitiable" (2008: 250).

McCormick has argued that Machiavelli advances republican political theory, although portraying Machiavelli in a way that is not as pro-social as some scholars (McCormick, 2015a; McCormick, 2015b). McCormick holds that in advocating liberty, Machiavelli has an anti-elitist dimension. He claims, for example, that a careful reading of Machiavelli's texts indicates he had a great admiration for Agathocles, a Greek leader of Syracuse who killed its nobility, redistributed wealth to the people, and established a citizen's army that included

ex-slaves (2015a). According to McCormick, Machiavelli would see the best prince as someone who purges a society of corruption, especially in its nobility, and who establishes a class of citizens “who are fully and extensively armed and who enjoy relatively equal socio-economic status with each other” (2015b: 265).

We divide the analysis that follows into two parts. In the first part, we will seek to extend the recent pro-social interpretation of Machiavelli by arguing that *The Prince* can be seen as an effort to advance a leadership ethics that is applicable to business today. When read carefully, we argue that many of the measures that have given Machiavelli a reputation for being extreme and oppressive turn out to have important limits. In the second part, we will explore legacy of Machiavelli’s thought for management scholars today. We will consider in detail how “Machiavellian” Machiavelli would have been according to the Mach IV scale, and how some of his ideas have much application for modern leadership theory.

I. UNDERSTANDING MACHIAVELLI’S MORAL AGENDA

Although in places Machiavelli argues it is ethical for a prince to use what we today would consider brutal means, it is important to understand he was writing at a time in the history of ideas before general concepts of “international law” and universal human rights had become as developed as they now are. Writing in a less settled time, Machiavelli nonetheless expresses constant concern that a prince should seek to uproot corruption and create a general dynamic that is socially progressive.

Using Historical Studies to Ground Ethics in Consequences

The approach that Machiavelli takes in *The Prince* draws on methods of history and practical philosophy, and allows him to offer ethical insight into how a prince can avoid the temptation to rule lawlessly. In the dedicatory letter, Machiavelli states he had gained some of his knowledge through the “continual study of ancient history” (1532/1988: 3). In discussing military preparation within the body of *The Prince*, he advises historical study for leaders as well:

As for mental exercise, a prince should read histories, especially for the light they shed on the actions of excellent (*eccellenti*) men: to see how they waged war, to discover the reasons for their victories and defeats, in order to avoid reverses and achieve conquests (1532/1988: 53).⁵

In this we see elements of consequentialist ethics. A prince should aim to be excellent by analyzing the actions of the great men of the past, with attention to what actions produced good results, and thus calculate consequences. He especially focuses on what emotions people will feel as the consequence of someone’s actions, and how these emotions will drive their behavior. In what is taken as an effort to contrast himself with Plato, Machiavelli claims that:

Because I want to write what will be useful (*utile*) to anyone who understands, it seems to me better to concentrate on what really happens rather than on theories or speculations. For many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist (1532/1988: 54).

Because he had access to numerous published historical studies, including those of Livy, Plutarch, and Thucydides, as well as editions of the writings of the great thinkers from the past such as Cicero, Plato, and Aristotle, Machiavelli had in his library a ready wealth of knowledge about the past, and knowledge about how different kinds of situations previously occurred and developed. This made it practical for Machiavelli to offer a political ethics based on consequences in a way that would not have been as easy before the rise of mass produced books in the fifteenth century made it possible for one person to read multiple books by different authors. The historical works available in 1513 allowed someone wrestling with decision making to learn what consequences had followed from similar decisions in the past. Building on all that he could learn from past books enabled Machiavelli to advance a general political realism on the types of actions that would have allowed someone to become an effective prince.

Machiavelli discusses the role of his study of ancient books in his development of the ethics he articulates in *The Prince* in a letter that he sent to his friend Francesco Vettori:

When evening comes, I return home and enter my study; on the threshold I take off my workday clothes, covered with mud and dirt, and put on the garments of court and palace. Fitted out appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on that food that alone is mine and for which I was born; where I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me. And for four hours at a time I feel no boredom. . . . And because Dante says that no one understands anything unless he retains what he has understood, I have jotted down what I have profited from in their conversation and composed a short study, *De principatibus (On Principalities)*,⁶ in which I delve as deeply as I can into the ideas concerning this topic, discussing the definition of a principedom, the categories of principedoms, how they are acquired, how they are retained, and why they are lost (Machiavelli, 1513/1996: 262-65).

Even if he had wanted to take such a realistic, case-study-based approach to ethics, Plato would have had difficulty doing so. Working around 390 BC the main histories he would have had were Thucydides and Herodotus, and both only in the forms of rolled up scrolls that did not even have spaces between letters, and would require a trained servant to read out loud. While Thucydides and Herodotus had begun to record and analyze human events with the methods we now associate with empirical historical studies, these two works do not provide a volume of historical situations approaching the number that could be read about by an ethicist working in Renaissance Italy.

Machiavelli extends his advice to ground decisions in realism to the case of advisers. He recommends a prince should have a few advisers who can share with him whatever they think and to whom he makes clear “being told the truth does not offend you” (1532/1988: 81). This is now considered a best practice in organizations, where surrounding oneself with trusted advisers who will tell you the truth or appointing a “devil’s advocate” to push back on ideas, are seen as vital components for effective decision making (Schwenk & Cosier, 1980). It is an important force to reduce the possibility of groupthink from occurring (Janis, 1971; see Esser, 1998, for a comprehensive review).

Managing Power in Leading the State

The Prince presents its ethical framework as a handbook on how a new leader could manage power so as to achieve greatness. He opens by saying all states are either republics or principalities, and that *The Prince* will focus on principalities. In his broader work on republics, *The Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli identifies principality as one of three good forms of government (the other two being aristocracy and democracy). He cautions in *Discourses* that because it is “so easily corruptible. . . the principality easily becomes tyrannical” (1531/1997: 23-24). In presenting directions on how someone could be a good prince, he provides a manual on not just how to strive for excellence, but also on what a prince must know and do in order to avoid being corrupted into the temptations of becoming a self-serving autocrat.

In order to govern a city, a prince must acquire and maintain power. *The Prince* makes reference to two sources of power that someone can have: an ability to coerce people with force, and an ability to rely upon the good will of the city’s people. These two ways to acquire power mirror French and Raven’s (1959) discussion of two distinct bases by which leaders can gain power—coercive power derived from the ability to punish others if they do not conform to requests, and referent power, which is derived from others wanting to emulate and be like the leader. Machiavelli is most famous for his claims about the way at times force can be the basis of power (i.e., via coercion), and his remarks on this are quite direct. For example, in discussing Hannibal (247 – 183/181 BCE), Machiavelli claims:

Although he had a very large army, composed of men from many countries, and fighting in foreign lands, there never arose any dissension, either among themselves or against their leader, whether things were going well or badly. This could be accounted for only in his inhuman cruelty (*inumana crudeltà*) which, together with his many good qualities, made him always venerable (*venerando*) and terrible (*terribile*) in the eyes of his troops. And if he had not been so cruel, his other virtues (*virtù*) would not have been sufficient to achieve that effect (1532/1988: 60).

Just as he was aware of torture from personal experience, Machiavelli was aware of and incorporates into his ethics the human capacity for corruption, violence, and waging war. In order to establish a new political order, he saw arms as necessary. In chapter 19, for instance, he argues that a prince should not follow the example of the benevolent emperor Marcus in “maintaining power that is already established and secure,” but the example of the more brutal emperor Severus “in the courses of action that are necessary for establishing himself in power” (1532/1988: 72). In chapter 6, Machiavelli includes Moses as a leader who used arms, presumably referring to stoning and the death of the first born (Exodus 12: 29-34) when he claims,

If Moses, Cyrus, Theseus and Romulus had been unarmed (*diarmati*), the new order which each of them established would not have been obeyed for very long, as happened in our times to Friar Girolamo Savonarola (1532/1988: 21).

The mention of Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Savonarola is especially poignant. Savonarola was the leader of the uprising that expelled the de’ Medici family from

Florence in 1494, but which failed to establish long term stability. In the concluding chapter of *The Prince*, Machiavelli says the Italians are oppressed, and someone could become the leader who would liberate them as the Hebrews, Persians, and Athenians were by Moses, Cyrus, and Theseus. It calls for the expulsion of foreign troops from Italy.

A second source of power that appears in *The Prince*, and is often overlooked when discussing Machiavellian leadership, is the goodwill that the people can develop towards a prince and his family if he governs them well over time. The relationship a good prince and ruling family can acquire with their people allows power to emanate from the bottom up. The level of power Machiavelli sees the people's goodwill giving a prince is especially evident in his discussion of how to avoid being overthrown in a conspiracy. In offering a calculus of the power dynamics involved in any potential conspiracy he claims:

In short, for conspirators there are only fears of discovery or betrayal, and the dreadful prospect of punishment; but the ruler has the prestige attaching to his office, together with the laws and resources of government at his disposal, as well as help from allies, all of which will help him to survive; to which if the general goodwill of the people be added, it is impossible (*impossibile*) that any would be rash enough to conspire (1532/1988: 65).

The simple consequences of how people feel and behave, make it in a prince's interest to conduct himself so as to earn the people's goodwill. In keeping with his efforts to ground his thought in the facts of history, Machiavelli provides the example of what ensued in a conspiracy in Bologna. When the Canneschi family killed Annibale Bentivoglio, who had been Bologna's leader, "immediately upon the murder, the people rose up and killed all the Canneschi" (1532/1988: 65). The people then found a distant relative of Bentivoglio, who could reign until his then infant son was old enough to assume leadership.

As effective, and even necessary, as force might be in the initial establishment of power, Machiavelli suggests the goodwill of the people is the firmer source for long-term power, which reinforces the importance of seeking soft bases of power rather than hard bases of power (French & Raven, 1959). He claims the goodwill a prince can earn by displaying the virtues of courage, optimism, spiritedness, and competence is especially advantageous:

But if it is a prince who builds his power upon the people, and if he knows how to command and if he is courageous, does not despair in difficult times, and maintains the morale of his people by his spiritedness and the measures that he takes, he will never find himself let down by them, and he will realize he had laid sound foundations of his power (1532/1988: 36-37).

We see here Machiavelli planting the seeds in Renaissance thought for many important leadership theories and behaviors that have emerged, such as transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978) and charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1997; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Both reinforce the importance of inspiring followers and demonstrating courage during difficult times, and are built off of the cultivation of power through gaining the respect and good will of the people.

Of all the things that Machiavelli recommends in *The Prince*, none has more consequences for the distribution of raw power in a good principality than his advice that any prince should arm his people. On this point Machiavelli is direct and unambiguous:

New princes, then never disarm their subjects; indeed, if they find them unarmed, they always provide them with weapons. For when you arm them, these weapons become your own: those whom you distrusted become loyal, those who were loyal remain so, and subjects are converted into partisans (*partigiani*) . . . But if you disarm your subjects, you begin to offend them, for you show that you do not trust them, either because you are weak and cowardly or because you are too suspicious (1532/1988: 72).

Giving subjects arms directly empowers them and makes them vital parts of his political system by giving them a role in any force that would be applied in its establishment and maintenance. This parallels modern approaches to leadership and management that suggest that empowering employees is a way to be an effective leader by ensuring employees have the resources they need to do their jobs, and helping employees understand how they play a role in the larger picture (Spreitzer, 1996). Arming citizens, as Machiavelli advocates, demonstrates that he is a proponent of giving citizens the resources they need to defend the laws, and ensuring their buy-in toward achieving the military goal of maintaining social order and defending the city. Indeed, we see here the incipient roots emerging of shared leadership in which power and influence are less distributed hierarchically but rather laterally between individuals (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2002).

Insofar as Machiavelli refers to force as one source of power, a prince giving the people arms imparts to his principality an element of the power relations present in a democracy. As an explanation for the logical importance of a discussion of the military in *The Prince* he notes:

The main foundations of all states (whether they are new, old or mixed) are good laws and good arms (*buone leggi e le buone armi*). Since it is impossible (*non possono*) to have good laws if good arms are lacking, and if there are good arms there must also be good laws, I shall leave laws aside and concentrate on arms (1532/1988: 42-43).

In discussing arms, Machiavelli claims the lessons of history indicate that the best form is a “national army” of citizens who fight in battle but who are neither mercenaries, nor troops of an allied state, nor a standing army like that possessed by ancient Rome.⁷ He catalogs how mercenaries had failed other Italian leaders in battle and explains this in terms of simple economics: “They have no affection for you or any other reason to induce them to fight for you, except a trifling wage, which is not sufficient to make them want to risk their lives for you” (1532/1988: 43).⁸ However, by empowering citizens through giving them arms, Machiavelli ensures that citizens are loyal and united toward achieving the larger goal of living in a free city with a good social order. Further, arming citizens can be linked to the path-goal theory of leadership which suggests that leaders can motivate followers to achieve goals by either removing obstacles to goal achievement or by increasing the rewards

that followers value and desire (Bass, 1985; House, 1971). By invoking the passion and strength of a national army to defend and protect their laws and state, we suggest that Machiavelli effectively motivates followers in order to bring about the future that the followers value and desire. In sharing martial power, giving arms to citizens, rebuking the use of mercenaries, and rallying citizens around the goal of keeping their state free, a prince effectively acts as a transformational leader by ensuring that the citizens buy into a common vision for the future and empowers them with the tools to achieve this larger organizational goal (Bass, 1985).

The consideration of arms goes to advice to the prince himself. To get the people to fight for him in war, a prince has to develop a relationship during times of peace where they care enough about him that they will make sacrifices. Machiavelli held that such an attitude would naturally develop over time if a prince governed reasonably well, but he also thought a prince can take actions that will facilitate the growth of such feelings. He needs to go out on hunts so he learns the land and can lead the citizen army on the battle field:

With regard to exercises, besides keeping his troops well disciplined and trained, he should very frequently engage in hunting, thus hardening his body and, at the same time, become familiar with the terrain: how mountains rise, how valleys open out and plains spread out, as well as with the characteristics of rivers and swamps; he should concern himself very much with all these matters. This knowledge (*cognizione*) is useful in two ways. First, one learns well the terrain of one's own country, and understands better its natural defenses; secondly, through knowing and exercising in the country side, one easily grasps the characteristics of any new terrain that must be explored (1532/1988: 52-53).

Hunting trips in his state's countryside for the sake of gaining knowledge for their military defense trains a prince to lead his people in a way modern political theory would describe as being both the head of state and the government's chief executive. In any invasion, his armed subjects would not just see his presence on the battle field, but they would know they are executing his decisions on how to conduct the fight. This leading from within the ranks can be linked to management by wandering around (MBWA; Peters & Waterman, 1982) which reinforces the powerful messages that leaders send when they are available to observe and listen to followers as their concerns arise. Further, this sets the stage for such modern leadership characterizations as Level 5 leadership (Collins, 2001) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) in which leaders serve the needs of their followers by getting involved to accomplish important tasks, while simultaneously giving credit to others for successes and taking the blame for failures.

Leading on the battle field also creates a comradery between a prince and the people by making them both soldiers defending the nation. Machiavelli advises a prince to focus on the study of war because arms are key to maintaining power and he notes that if princes "concern themselves more with delicacies (*delicatezze*) than arms, they lose power" (1532/1988: 52).⁹ Giving citizens arms, training, and leadership in battles draws them into supporting the state's order and defending its

liberty from the control of foreigners. In so far as good arms provide the necessary conditions for good laws, including citizens in military activities makes the people anchors of a good society.

Writing in 1513, Machiavelli had the historical case of Rome, which tried to have a standing army focused entirely on war but found that this caused problems for Roman society. In practice, a class of people devoted to nothing but combat did not produce people focused on protecting the state and its laws, but instead a rapacious and cruel group that created pressure for the emperors to act against the people's good:

For it was hard to satisfy both the soldiers and the people: the reason was that the people liked a peaceful life, and consequently wanted to have moderate princes, whereas the soldiers wanted warlike princes, who were arrogant, cruel and rapacious (*rapace*). The soldiers wanted the people to be treated harshly by princes, so that they could have double pay and give vent to their own avarice (*avarizia*) and cruelty (1532/1988: 67).¹⁰

By recommending arms be given to the people without the creation of a standing army, Machiavelli avoids the concentration of the power inherent from arms in a narrowly focused class that could be seduced to using the arms for selfish material gain. Relying on regular armed citizens for defense thus avoids one source of oppression that plagued ancient Rome.

Machiavelli's arming of citizens and rejection of a standing army are two examples of the overall approach to balancing power he takes to ethics. The idea that balancing power avoids corruption is directly articulated in Machiavelli's longer book *Discourses on Livy*. There he notes that there are three basic good forms of government: principality, aristocracy, and democracy. However, all three are "so easily corruptible" (1531/1997: 23) that they can degenerate into tyranny, oligarchy, and anarchy respectively. In the best of all possible worlds, Machiavelli claims one could overcome the threat of corruption by creating a hybrid state with elements of all three because "when in the same city there is a principality, an aristocracy, and a democracy, one keeps watch over the other" (1531/1997: 26). In an account of the attention to how power plays out in economic and social struggles in Machiavelli's thought, Del Lucchese (2009) claims Machiavelli saw moderate conflict as positive for helping a society function. This would suggest that if a state could establish stable princely, aristocratic, and democratic institutions, their constant interplay could drive social progress.

To establish and maintain social order within a principality, a prince balances the power in part by balancing how he addresses interests of the parts of society. The parts include the nobles, the people, and, in the case of Rome, a standing army. At all costs a prince avoids something that would make any part hate him. A drawback of principalities, which Machiavelli suggest republics might be able to avoid, is that a prince's dependence on others, who might be corrupt, can force him into taking actions that are considered bad. He notes:

For if a group (whether it is the people or the soldiers or the nobles) whose support you consider necessary for maintaining your power is corrupt (*corrotta*), you are forced to indulge its proclivities in order to satisfy it. In such circumstance good works (*buone opere*) are inimical to you (1532/1988: 68).

On the surface, the claim that in some circumstances a leader needs to do things that are “not good,” seems to be a rejection of ethics. In the next section, however, we will argue that it arises from an effort on the part of Machiavelli to expand ethical thought in a way that it can address a world where there are both threats of corruption and promises of civic cooperation.

Is it Ethical for Good Leaders to Do Bad Things?

Machiavelli is infamous for his idea that the necessities of power require leaders to do bad things, and his claims in this regard require close scrutiny for an understanding of his ethics. It is an ethics of compromise. Much of the reason a prince will find himself doing morally repugnant things comes from the constraints of the real world. In 1513 Italy, one would encounter people who would only follow the law if there was a credible threat of force and violence, and there was nothing any prince could have done to change that fact. Even worse, there was no way of knowing when one was interacting with such people. One event that especially exemplifies how violent Italy was at that time is the Pazzi conspiracy. In the middle of a church service on Easter Sunday, April 26, 1478, the head of the de' Medici family and leader of Florence Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brother were attacked, with the brother being killed. In such circumstances, Machiavelli warns any possible prince that since all actions pose risk “prudence (*prudenza*) consists in knowing how to assess the qualities of disadvantages (*qualità degli inconvenienti*), and to choose the least bad (*manco tristo*) course of action as being the right one to follow” (1532/1988: 79).

While the traditional understanding of Machiavelli in management is that he was not concerned that a leader's actions be “morally right,” the historical truth is that Machiavelli does not eschew morality per se. Although a prince, leader, or manager may do something that is bad, Machiavelli claims that a bad action is only justified if a full assessment indicates that the chosen action is the least bad action he could take as far as overall consequences. It is not a rejection of morality altogether, but a moral theory that accounts for moral dilemmas, where something bad happens no matter what one does. The choice is not between a good and an evil, but between two evils, and Machiavelli would say the right thing to do is to fully evaluate the evils and choose the lesser of them.

Hence when he takes up the question “is it better (*meglio*) to be loved or feared” Machiavelli states both are desirable, but if one must choose between one or the other “it is much safer (*sicuro*) to be feared” (1532/1988: 59). Machiavelli's substitution of “safer (*sicuro*)” for “better (*meglio*)” indicates the only reason for placing a priority on fear over love, is due to the existence of deceptive and unscrupulous people who might seek to do one harm. Although he stresses the value of winning the people's love with the example of the people's response to the assassination of Annibale Bentivoglio, in a society where people might attack a prince in a church service, having some level of fear very well may save one's life. It is thus a delicate balance on how to become loved by the people while maintaining some level of fear as well. This is consistent with the approach advocated by Snook (2008: 17) for leaders “to read the signals and adapt their

styles accordingly”—in the case of Machiavelli, the signals of the times would advocate selecting a leadership approach that protects one’s life and responds most effectively to the threats present in the environment.

The adapting of one’s approach to meet the specific demands of the situation in order to be most effective, forms the basis of contingency leadership (Fiedler, 1958). We can see an anticipation of this theory in Machiavelli:

And one does not find men who are so prudent that they are capable of being sufficiently flexible: either because our natural inclinations are too strong to permit us to change, or because, having always fared well by acting in a certain way, we do not think it a good idea to change our methods. Therefore, it is necessary for a cautious man to act expeditiously, he does not know how to do it; this leads to his failure. But if it were possible to change one’s character to suit the times and circumstances, one would always be successful (1532/1988: 86).

A good prince must take the full environment into account when deciding on the best leadership behaviors to display in order to increase the likelihood of success. Indeed, we argue that Machiavelli’s pragmatic approach to leadership is one of the hallmark features, which ensures its relevancy to the modern age. Rather than articulating that a leader be tyrannical or oppressive, Machiavelli argues that the most effective leader exhibits leadership based on an analysis of the needs of the situation (which are continually changing). Indeed, a refusal to change and adapt to new environments and situations, as well as an inability to connect with others, have been argued to be some of the more important reasons for executive derailment when it comes to top leaders ultimately failing in their jobs (Goldsmith, 2007; van Velsion & Leslie, 1995).

Because of the social realities in his Florence, Machiavelli does make the bold claim in *The Prince* that it very well may have been even “ethical” for a leader to be cruel. While this seems ethically repugnant today, in historical circumstances of 16th century Italy it would have been more reasonable. From ancient history Machiavelli mentions Hannibal as having been able to maintain his authority with cruelty, and from recent Italian history he often cites Cesare Borgia (1475 - 1507). Machiavelli provides one especially striking example of Borgia’s cruelty. After he took over Romagna,

he found that it had been controlled by powerless (*impotenti*) lords, who were more disposed to despoil their subjects than rule them properly, thus being a source of disunion (*disunione*) rather than of union (*unione*), consequently that region was overrun by thefts, quarrels and outrages of every kind (1532/1988: 26).

In order to establish social order, Borgia appointed a brutal minister Remiro d’Orco with full power over the area. After order was restored, however, Borgia became concerned that the extent to which d’Orco had welded power could incur unacceptable levels of hatred towards their government, and arranged to have d’Orco decapitated and his body left one morning in a public square.¹¹ The “spectacle” (*spettacolo*) of his body made the people “both satisfied and amazed” (1532/1988: 26). In reflecting upon Borgia elsewhere in *The Prince*, Machiavelli claims

taking such cruel measures to establish social order is “much more merciful” than allowing social chaos:

Cesare Borgia was considered cruel, yet his cruelty restored order to Romagna, unifying it and rendering it peaceful and loyal. If his conduct is properly considered (*considera bene*), he will be judged to have been much more merciful (*molto più pietoso*) than the Florentine people, who let Pistoia to be torn apart (*distruggere*) in order to avoid acquiring a reputation for cruelty (1532/1988: 58).

In these remarks, as in the ones setting up the account of Borgia's appointment and treatment of d'Orco, we see Machiavelli make the case of leadership ethics being an imperative of leadership to avoid harms from disorder by imparting union/unity to the body over which leadership is exercised. Machiavelli's rationalization suggests he would see cruelty not as “good,” but as less bad than what would follow in cases where a leader could not ensure lawfulness among the people.

There is an interesting contrast with Machiavelli's claim that sometimes “necessity” requires princes to do things that are “not good,” and Aquinas' argument that it is sometimes not sinful to wage war (*Summa Theologica* Part II, Question 40, Article 1, 1952). Drawing heavily on Augustine's “just war” theory, Aquinas argues that war can be “just” if, and only if, it is waged by a sovereign state, its cause is just, and also those waging war “intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil” (1273/1952: 578). The arguments of *The Prince* on necessary evils address circumstances in which the very existence of public order, and thus the subsistence of the state itself, is uncertain. They are thus somewhat prior to the question of whether it might be ethical for one established state to harm another established state.

Making Lawfulness and Social Order Ultimate Values

Because the ultimate end of any action a prince takes as a leader is to establish and maintain social order, there are limits to the scope of actions. Machiavelli recommends against any kind of harm to someone that would cause them to feel hatred for a prince and think of retaliation. Machiavelli claims this is possible if a prince avoids several things:

It is perfectly possible to be feared without incurring hatred. And this can always be achieved if he refrains from laying hands on the property of his citizens and subjects, and on their womenfolk. If it is necessary to execute anyone, this should be done only if there is a proper justification and obvious reason (1532/1988: 5).

The line between being feared and becoming hated gives a principled limit based on the consequences to the citizens' emotions towards princely behavior. Not crossing the line keeps a prince from becoming an arbitrary tyrant. The limit arises from facts about human emotional understanding and responses. Cruel punishments, where it has been openly determined in a trial that there has been a crime to be punished, make others likely to avoid such crimes. Arbitrarily executing someone where there is an unclear rational makes loved ones and the community resentful.

In respecting his citizens' property and women, a prince gives them a sphere of private life impervious from whatever power dynamics play out in the city's politics. Given that it was a practice of princes to harm women and take property in Machiavelli's time, his rejection of this is ethically significant. It constitutes a push towards a more humanistic approach to leadership, and thus sets the stage from moving from a Theory X, autocratic leadership style that emphasizes tight control, toward a more Theory Y approach to leadership that focuses on relationships where threat of punishment is not always needed (McGregor, 1960). In providing any prince with the rule to not act in a way that causes people to hate him, Machiavelli formulates from his emotional consequentialism, a limit on the exercise of governmental power.

In dealing with the moral complexities and dilemmas posed by Renaissance politics, he considers ethical notions that would later be articulated in modern efforts to find a way of grounding ethical theory. Machiavelli's analysis that the harm from a few dramatic cruel punishments is "more merciful" than allowing widespread harm from social disorder and crime, anticipates the notion in utilitarianism that actions that might harm some are justified if they promote an overall level of a society-wide happiness that outweighs the harm in question (Mill, 1863/1987). Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli stresses the desirability of establishing a social order where people will follow laws and even claims "good laws" are one of any state's "main foundations" (1532/1988: 42). In his effort to give an account of the foundation of ethical thought in general, Kant also looked to the concept of "law." Indeed his first articulation of the categorical imperative, which gives the form of ethical thinking, describes the demand of ethics to be:

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it can become a universal law (*allgemeines Gesetz*) (1785/1990: 38).¹²

In another work called *Perpetual Peace*, Kant (1795/1957) argues humans' universal experience of ethical insights could be used to end war if an organization was formed in which all the governments joined and committed to use discussion rather than war to resolve differences. He called his envisioned organization "the league of nations" (1795/1957: 16), and the idea set the seeds for the actual League of Nations that was established after World War I, and after its failure, the United Nations (UN). Although with organizations like the UN it is now possible to imagine how humans might reach a point where diplomacy, and a more universal rule of law might render the use of force as written about in *The Prince* obsolete, this still has not occurred. Back in Machiavelli's time, his contemporary Thomas More published a book in 1516 explaining how in theory all violence and war could be ended, but he admitted he had no practical idea how the actual societies of the Renaissance could progress to such a state (1516/2003). Machiavelli, however, had a practical plan on how to at least get human beings to behave lawfully, even if he could not see how we might end violence and war completely.

The practical problem Machiavelli addresses involves identifying the kinds of actions a prince can take when the people of his society are not acting in lawful ways,

and once he establishes the rule of law, which actions will maintain lawful behavior. The leader's job is to get his people to act by the maxim that they should follow laws. In his discussion of how societies evolve with princes in the *Discourses*, he claims that when societies first sought leaders, they elected men who were "stronger and braver," and from such leadership gained a "knowledge of justice" (*cognizione della giustizia*) (1531/1997: 24). His description of how he thinks this process occurred fits with his overall approach of grounding social ethics in a kind of emotional and behavioral consequentialism:

In the beginning of the world, when its inhabitants were few, they lived for a time scattered like the beasts; then as the generations multiplied they gathered together, and in order better to defend themselves, they began to consider carefully who among them was stronger and braver, and they made him their prince and obeyed him. From this arose knowledge of things honorable and good as opposed to those which are pernicious and evil, for noticing that when someone did harm to his benefactor it aroused hatred and compassion among men, since they condemned the ungrateful and honored those who showed gratitude, and thinking that the same injuries could also be inflicted upon themselves, they set about making laws in order to avoid similar evils and ordained punishments for whoever violated them: from this arose knowledge of justice (1531/1997: 24).

Once this knowledge was understood by those people living within the rule of law, the people changed to the extent that when they later voted for princes, "they did not support the strongest (*gagliardo*) but, instead the man who was most prudent (*prudente*) and just" (*giusto*) (1531/1997: 24; 1531/1900: 10).¹³ Machiavelli holds that a good prince, especially in the beginning when a state is in the throes of anarchy, teaches the people to see and move toward justice.

The Prince is thus an exportation of the elementary practices a prince must use to lead a collection of people so they progress from being lawless towards each other to treating each other ethically. To an extent, it parallels efforts Kant would later make in his succinct *Grundlegung* (Kant, 1785/1990; Kant, 1785/1994). In contrast to his lengthy *Discourses* (1531/1997) and *Florentine Histories* (1532/1990), Machiavelli's *Prince* affords us a compact treatise like the *Grundlegung*. Kant's *Grundlegung* applies reason to deduce the necessary metaphysical preconditions for rational beings to have ethics; Machiavelli's *Prince* abstracts from the lessons of human history the necessary interpersonal preconditions for the establishment and maintenance of ethical civility in a world governed by states. A universe in which there is much moral complexity.

II. APPLYING MACHIAVELLI'S PHILOSOPHY TO CURRENT MANAGEMENT THEORY

Although *The Prince* is very much pragmatically focused on the particular challenges that a prince would face in fighting corruption and establishing a socially progressive dynamic in a sixteenth-century Italian city, the work contains many insights into the raw nature of power and the of leadership ethics, which have an enduring application in our time.

How Would Machiavelli Score on the Mach IV?

In reflecting upon *The Prince* today, business scholars might wonder how much its ethical system applies to how leaders should operate in our present world. A difficulty with readily applying Machiavelli's thought to business management is that many people have a stereotypical understanding of Machiavelli that does not fit with the complexity of *The Prince*. Of the various considerations of Machiavelli, perhaps none has influenced the understanding of his thought in the business literature more than Christie's and Geis' *Studies in Machiavellism* (1970).

However, their interpretation of Machiavelli's *Prince* drew largely from sections of the text which reinforced the need to uphold authority—and made use of some of Machiavelli's most provocative quotes considered apart from their historical context. Due to its widespread use, the Mach IV scale has influenced how many management scholars think about Machiavelli's *Prince*. To some extent this work has taught management scholars about Machiavelli in a way that overly simplifies his ideas, and parallels the way Aristophanes' *Clouds* so negatively presented the philosophy of Socrates.¹⁴ Since Christie and Geis' development of the Mach IV, there have been efforts to revise the Machiavellian scale (Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009; Rauthmann, 2012; Rauthmann & Will, 2011; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). All are also based again on including in a concept of "Machiavellianism" a rejection of moral restraint like the Mach IV, so they continue the stereotype that the historical Machiavelli did not care deeply about morals.

One might wonder if a historical, more ethically-nuanced Machiavelli would have answered some of Mach IV items in the most stereotypical "Machiavellian" way, which has been popularized by the Mach IV. The following four items from the scale are especially instructive to demonstrate how the current Mach IV characterization of "Machiavellianism" differs from a more historically-accurate understanding of how Machiavelli discusses moral complexity:

- It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.
Stereotypical Mach IV answer: strongly agree (5) = highly Machiavellian
Historically-nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli: strongly disagree (1)
- The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that criminals are stupid enough to get caught.
Stereotypical Mach IV answer: strongly agree (5) = highly Machiavellian
Historically-nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli: strongly disagree (1)
- One should take action only when sure it is morally right.
Stereotypical Mach IV answer: strongly disagree (1) = highly Machiavellian
Historically-nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli: neutral to strongly agree (3-5)
- Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean moral lives.
Stereotypical Mach IV Answer: strongly disagree (1) = highly Machiavellian
Historically-nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli: neutral to strongly agree (3-5) (depending on what "clean" means.)

Machiavelli's approach to considering all the consequences of one's decisions and actions, would have any agent avoid "cutting corners." Machiavelli sees lawless criminal behavior as corrupt and as something any good prince should lead his people away from (although he may accomplish this initially by ensuring any punishments they would face if caught are ones they would fear). The historical Machiavelli does not reject seeking the morally right action; he would recommend that all good and bad consequences be considered, and whichever action has the most good and fewest bad consequences would be for Machiavelli the "right" moral action. The third item might be considered neutral to the extent that Machiavelli might not require an actor to be "sure" of an action if it is not possible to have that level of certainty. One major goal of a prince is to establish the rule of law in his city, which would allow "most people" to get ahead by living morally, so Machiavelli would value creating a social system where people get ahead by living morally.

One question where we believe Machiavelli would agree with the predominantly accepted Mach IV rating involves physician-assisted suicide:

- People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.

Stereotypical Mach IV answer: Strongly agree (5) = highly Machiavellian
Historically-nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli: strongly agree (5)

Machiavelli would indeed strongly agree that patients should have the choice of physician-assisted suicide, but so would many medical ethicists. This item highlights how Machiavelli's approach to ethics stands apart from any approach that would specify whether a specific action is "moral" or "immoral" in all circumstances. In any difficult situation a Machiavellian ethicist weighs all the options and if they are all "bad," considers it at least reasonable to choose what one he thinks is the "least bad." While in this world evil cannot always be avoided, at least it can be minimized.

In turning to the remaining Mach IV questions, we would divide them into three groups: those where we would hold that a historically-nuanced reading of Machiavelli would justify the opposite response of the stereotypical answer of the Mach IV, those where complexity might cause Machiavelli to answer with a 3 (neutral), and those where the historical Machiavelli would indeed provide the response currently characterized as "Machiavellian" by the Mach IV.

One question where we would claim Machiavelli would strongly disagree, while the traditional Mach IV answer would be to strongly agree, is:

- Generally speaking, people won't work hard unless they're forced to do so.

The suggestions that a prince try to motivate his people to fight for him indicates that, generally speaking, people will work hard for the social good if they are led. This aspect of the human spirit seems to be why he prefers citizen soldiers over mercenaries, whom a prince would have to coax into "working for" him with money. Machiavelli seems to value work itself, and suggests princes engage in martial training rather than seeking to amass luxuries. He further speaks admiringly of a practice of German princes for provisioning their fortresses with "enough raw materials to keep the people engaged for a year in those occupations essential to the life of the

city” (1532/1988: 38). Machiavelli seems to hold that work for the good of society, be it commercial or martial, gives people a role that adds meaning to their life, rather than simply meeting the needs of life. This further reinforces the idea that Machiavelli would support a more Theory Y (relationship based) management style than a Theory X (autocratic) style (McGregor, 1960).

A Mach IV question, where our interpretation would suggest Machiavelli might answer 5 (strongly agree) instead of 1 (strongly disagree) would be:

- All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than to be important and dishonest.

We think a careful reading of *The Prince* suggests Machiavelli would value humbleness over “importance.” In insisting a prince should hunt on the grounds of his principality so he can personally lead his citizen soldiers in battle, Machiavelli recommends an approach that conveys to the people the notion of not being too important so as not to risk his life alongside his followers in times of war. It effectively demonstrates both servant (Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) and level five leadership (Collins, 2001). A prince would rather be honest if he could, and so that would be “better” in the abstract. The problem is that sometimes, when dealing with lawlessness, honesty is not the best option because it may lead to worse things happening.

We would hold that ten of the Mach IV questions fail to capture *The Prince*’s complexity where the historical Machiavelli might have neither agreed nor disagreed with each item (thus answering 3). Five items where the Mach IV score is for agreeing, but our reading of Machiavelli suggests he might have been more neutral are:

- Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.
- Most people forget more easily the death of a parent than the loss of their property.
- Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.
- Barnum was very wrong when he said there’s a sucker born every minute.
- It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.

Machiavelli does caution about trusting people too much, but he also recommends having advisers one can trust, and in general trusting the people by arming them. The famous remark about how people would resent a prince confiscating all their property more than killing their father has a specific political context, and would not apply to the broader idea of how they would grieve over the loss of a parent and property in general. “Never” is a strong word and there are contexts in which Machiavelli would find a leader being transparent advisable. While Machiavelli thinks people can be deceived, it’s unclear if he would say they are as gullible as Barnum suggests. The core role of a prince is not to treat the people as “suckers” but to lead them to be good citizens. The fifth item fits with a remark in *Discourses* 1.3, where Machiavelli claims that “it is necessary for anyone who organizes a republic and establishes laws” (1531/1997: 28) to assume people will act wickedly if given a

chance. It is less clear the extent to which the possible vicious streak remains actively present in all people once social stability has been established by good laws, or if one should assume its presence in outside of state-creating contexts such as when interacting with close family, close friends, or even close advisers.

Five questions where the Mach IV score is for strongly disagreeing (i.e., 1), but our reading suggests Machiavelli might be more neutral (i.e., 3) are:

- Most people are brave.
- Most people are basically good and kind.
- When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reasons.
- It is possible to be good in all respects.
- The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.

Machiavelli's stress on martial values and creating a citizen's army suggest he thinks many people can be brave. He also seems to think that most people will be good and kind if rule of law is established, but it is unclear what he would say about this in general. Whether or not one would want to give real reasons for actions would depend on the situation. However, when it comes to encouraging the people to follow good laws, Machiavelli might agree that giving the true or real reasons would be best. Whether it is possible to be good in every respect depends on how one considers dilemmas—one can be good if ways of fully assessing a dilemma are utilized and the action taken is the least bad choice. While it might be advantageous to tell people what they want to hear in some cases, in other cases (such as when an individual is a trusted adviser) it is best to tell the truth even if the truth is unpleasant.

We believe that the three remaining items are ones where our reading of *The Prince* would suggest that Machiavelli would give the full Mach IV "Machiavellian" answer of strongly agreeing with the first, and strongly disagreeing with the last two:

- It is wise to flatter important people. (strongly agree)
- Honesty is the best policy in all cases. (strongly disagree)
- There is no excuse for lying to someone else. (strongly disagree)

Of these, the latter two involve absolute statements and Machiavelli would say there might be exception because of social complexity, especially for a prince trying to establish or maintain the rule of law.

With 20 questions that are scored from 1 to 5, people can score between 20 (not at all "Machiavellian") and 100 (highly "Machiavellian") on the Mach IV scale. Our reading of Machiavelli suggests Machiavelli's own score would be around a 60, which would be neutral. One could argue he might give different numbers than we suggest, but the overall point is that the Mach IV scale does not accurately capture the approach to life and ethics that Niccolò Machiavelli himself likely espoused.

The Legacy of Machiavelli's Theories for Leadership Today

Five-hundred years after Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, much of the approach to leadership he articulated remains relevant today. In applying Machiavelli's framework to current leadership theory, it is important to note that the assertions about the necessity

of being feared advocated for in *The Prince* are given most directly in the context of a government leader. A sixteenth-century Italian prince needed to be “feared” in his capacity of enforcing the rule of law. In twenty-first-century Western society this role is largely exercised by a city’s mayor who has authority over its police, or the president who has authority over federal law enforcement and the military.

Scholars have argued that the US president can take on aspects of a Machiavellian prince. The office was constructed by a convention of men that was being presided over by a retired general, who had led the troops in the field during the rebellion against the British Empire (George Washington). Many anticipated he would become the first president as they were drafting the article that created the presidency. In a book exploring how applicable Machiavelli’s political theories are to the workings of modern republics, Ardrito (2015) argues that a lawyer, who took such a leading role in the Constitution’s drafting that he earned the reputation as “the father of the constitution” (James Madison), thought about many details concerning government, power, and State in a manner that has parallels with Machiavelli’s *Prince* and *Discourses*. As it turns out, James Madison, the convention’s leading lawyer, was the only other man present besides George Washington who was ultimately chosen to become a president. Further, in an analysis of the American republic’s greatest political crisis, Danoff (2000) argues that many of the actions taken by Abraham Lincoln could be considered highly Machiavellian.

Perhaps one of the best modern examples of where ethicists might entertain the notion that “cruelty well-used” can be ethically defensible is the decision of President Harry Truman to order that atomic bombs be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The emotional impact of a single explosion instantly destroying so many buildings and killing so many civilians did lead to Japan surrendering. Yet, Truman had an alternative of having the American army invade Japan and center the efforts of ending the war on soldiers fighting soldiers. In considering whether dropping atomic bombs on two cities was “less bad” than proceeding with an invasion, Truman had to wrestle with many factors. Due to intercepted messages, the American military had knowledge that the Japanese would fight until the very end (Landesman, 2003) and the likelihood of extremely damaging kamikaze attacks on the American invasion fleet prior to landing to wage the ground war were very real (Spector, 1985). Furthermore, based on the way that the Japanese fought to protect Okinawa and other islands by utilizing suicide bombers, refusing to surrender, and fighting to the death, it was clear that a ground war would be extremely costly in terms of American lives (Landesman, 2003). Further, Truman also may have factored in the benefit of dropping atomic bombs on Japan as a way to send a message to Russia regarding American power in order to extract more concessions for the Allies (Rawls, 1995).¹⁵ The complexity and enormity of his decision must have weighed on him as he met with Stalin, Churchill, and Attlee at Potsdam. In the end, the traditional narrative is that he authorized the use of the atomic bombs to shorten the agony of war as well as to save young American, and even Japanese, lives (McCullough, 1992). Nonetheless, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was cruel by any definition of the term.

It is less clear whether Machiavelli’s ethical system would justify the use of cruelty on the part of non-governmental business leaders. Business relations assume

government maintains the rule of law, and that all parties, customers, employees, and managers are law-abiding parties who enter into business on a non-coerced free basis. Some of the recommendations about how an Italian prince could create and/or maintain social order from social chaos might not apply to business leaders or in any other non-government context. The application of this dimension of *The Prince* is that business leaders should respect the local rule of law, strive to make sure their businesses have well-defined and well-enforced rules of good conduct (the equivalent of “good laws”), and in the case of international businesses operating in developing countries, Machiavelli would have them be advocates for the rule of law by supporting local non-corrupt governments. There is nothing in *The Prince* that indicates a business leader is justified for doing cruel things, or harming others to advance his or her own personal goals like Gordon Gekko does in the movie *Wall Street*.

Managers may, however, face classic dilemmas where they have to choose between multiple bad options, such as cutting a company's research budget, laying off staff, or risking that the company be unable to compete enough to remain solvent. In such dilemmas being willing to do the least bad action quickly in a Machiavellian fashion might minimize the overall negative impact of the situation.

Other relevant topics discussed by Machiavelli that apply to modern leadership theories include humility, information sharing, and power dynamics. Humility, has increasingly become a hot topic in the management sciences as it forms the basis of various types of leadership conceptualizations (i.e., Level 5 leadership: Collins, 2001; spiritual leadership: Fry, 2003; servant leadership: Greenleaf, 1977; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), as well as recent discussions of the importance of mindfulness among leaders (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014; Reina, 2015). All of these approaches emphasize a reduction in self-serving actions and advocate for leadership which considers an expanded group of stakeholders and has a higher purpose in mind beyond simply ensuring bottom-line profits. Machiavelli plants the seed for such thinking when he emphasizes how important it is for a prince to win the goodwill of his people, to establish the rule of law so the people can live their lives and learn justice, and the importance of personally leading his citizens in battle.

Information sharing within the realm of leadership is another area in which more holistic thinking about Machiavelli can expand our understanding. Effective communication is considered a vital leadership competency which aids in establishing influence and sets the most effective leaders apart from the rest (Conger, 1998). Especially during crises, leaders should communicate early and often, sharing with others what they know and what they don't know in order to reduce ambiguity and fear of the unknown (Mitroff, 2001). Machiavelli similarly lays the foundation for this way of thinking in *The Prince* when he argues a prince must be fully involved in leading his citizens in the field and have advisors who can be entirely honest and open with him.

Finally, Machiavelli's discussion in *The Prince* provides rich material for modern-day discussions of power and politics in organizations. Political skill, or the ability to understand others at work and use this understanding to influence others in order to achieve organizational or personal goals (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwater,

Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004), is discussed by Machiavelli in great depth. Machiavelli sees a need to understand the politics and the changing dynamics a leader faces. Machiavelli articulates an approach to leadership which balances opposing needs—for example, he advocates for both instilling a sense of fear *and* love in his followers, while also being sure to do nothing that violates his people to the extent he would become hated. This parallels recent work suggesting the importance of paradoxical leadership behavior in which leaders exhibit seemingly competing yet interrelated behaviors in tandem (Zhang, Waldman, Han, & Li, 2015). Most importantly, by establishing and maintaining the rule of law, a prince creates a social system in which the strong cannot wield unlimited power over the weak, but everyone is bound by justice.

CONCLUSION

In sum, despite the tendency for management scholars to largely overstate the extent to which Machiavelli advocated for oppressive and autocratic leadership, we hope that our analysis has built the case for a more balanced, holistic, historically, and ethically-nuanced understanding of Machiavelli. Writing *The Prince* at the height of the Italian Renaissance, Machiavelli worked as a scholar who laid much of the groundwork for modern management and leadership theory. Although he does sometimes give harsh advice, it is important to interpret this advice in light of the fact that Machiavelli was grappling with how someone might have ruled in the dangerous conditions present in Renaissance Italy. Further, his writing sought to tackle the larger issue of how a government leader must address the problem that without the rule of law, there are people who see themselves as “strong,” who will exploit and harm those they see as “weak.” We suggest that Machiavelli advocated establishing justice as a leader although this sometimes consisted of carrying out an action that in times of lawfulness and peace would be considered harsh, and that Machiavelli himself describes as “not good.” However, any such harsh actions, should represent the “least bad” action among alternatives that may have produced even worse outcomes. When read with care, *The Prince* thus yields an understanding of Machiavelli that is a far cry from the commonly accepted thinking about him as advocating ruthless and oppressive rule. It shows us a picture of someone, who amidst the political upheavals at the dawn of our modern age, sought to craft a map whereby one man could lead his city out of chaos and foreign rule to a state where all could live with laws and justice.

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NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Politics*, II.2, 1253a31-33.
2. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XV.
3. It was initially dedicated to Guiliamo de' Medici, and then dedicated to Lorenzo after he became the head of the Medici family with Guiliamo's death (Cronin, 2016).

4. Machiavelli does discuss bad fortune as something that can bring evil to a person, but even in the case of fortune, a person can make its consequences less bad by managing it as well as possible.

5. Translations of *The Prince* will be those of Price (1988), with some adaptations to fit closer with the Italian.

6. *De principatibus (On Principalities)* was the name for *The Prince* that Machiavelli used. The book was named *The Prince* after his death by the person publishing it (Ardito, 2015: 22).

7. In his analysis of Machiavelli's discussions of mercenaries in *The Prince*, Erwin, argues that the critical issue turns on whether they have any personal dedication to a prince that would make him "the 'author' of the intentions of those who have arms in hand" (2010: 557).

8. Another ethical issue raised in Machiavelli's low view of mercenaries is that in several places he suggests desire for wealth distracts from the development of virtue. Hence in the *Discourses*, he argues some principalities degenerated into tyrannies when hereditary succession replaced elections and, on assuming power, heirs "thought princes had nothing to do but surpass others in luxury and lasciviousness and all other forms of licentiousness, so that as the prince came to be hated, then became afraid on account of this hatred, and quickly passed from fear to harmful acts" (1531/1997: 24).

9. Machiavelli's reference to "delicacies" may convey a moral judgment. Elsewhere in *The Prince* and *Discourses* he associates material austerity with virtue.

10. As in his discussions of mercenaries and licentiousness of hereditary princes, we see in his criticism of Roman soldiers' rapaciousness, desire for double pay, and avarice an association in Machiavelli's mind between desire for monetary wealth and moral corruption.

11. Benner interprets Machiavelli as portraying Borgia's actions with respect to d'Orco as not thought out in detail from the beginning, but as responses to the way events unfolded from d'Orco's use of "the fullest power [potestà]" (2013: 102) Borgia initially imparted to him.

12. Giorgini also compares Machiavelli's stress on the importance of law and establishment of the State as a pre-condition for ethics as having Kantian echoes. He claims that one of Machiavelli's goals in his writing is to provide guides for statesmen and that "the categorical imperative for a real statesman is, therefore, to create or preserve the political community, which is the necessary condition for living a genuinely human life" (2008: 249).

13. The process where the people learn enough about justice from being governed by a strong leader to the point that they can be governed by a just leader seems to be what Machiavelli believes happened in the case of Romagna where after time the people grew to hate the strong rule of d'Orco and were governable by less draconian means.

14. In *The Apology*, Plato gives a rendition of Socrates' speech at his famous trial. Socrates begins by rebutting stereotypical thoughts about him that people had gotten from the simplified satire of *The Clouds*. He especially thinks Aristophanes' portrayal of him swinging above the stage up in a basket "in the air" as mischaracterizing the way his use of critical thinking detached him from common beliefs (Plato, 19c).

15. Whether or not this was a primary reason for dropping the atomic bombs is debated. See Alperovitz (1996) for the revisionist position and Newman (1995) for a defense of the traditional narrative.

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