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Liberal Ed 166  
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## NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI:

### AN INTRODUCTION AND A DISCUSSION ON HIS THEORIES

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) was an Italian statesman and author. Machiavelli is usually considered to be Renaissance Italy's greatest political philosopher. He brought forth several ideas concerning the science of politics. In fact, he is also considered the father of the modern science of politics. In this paper I will deal slightly with Machiavelli's life but mainly with two theses of his.

Born in Florence, Machiavelli was educated primarily in private schools. Later he became a prominent man, serving as the first secretary of the council in the Republic of Florence, when the ruling family, the Medici's, were driven from power in 1498. He had much to do in his office, as the republic was on the verge of being destroyed by Count Borgia, who was trying to create a territory for himself in Central Italy. Machiavelli was not just a man of

words, as he was always ready to ride off and face dangers.

But the Medici family returned to power in 1512 and dismissed Machiavelli from office. They had him arrested on charges of conspiracy and thrown into prison. There he was tortured but finally released under the direct command of Pope Leo X. Because of his persecution, Machiavelli was reduced to poverty, and turned his thoughts to writing. In his most famous book, The Prince (written in 1513), he avocated the thesis that a ruler or statesman shouldn't worry about what means he takes to accomplish his purpose. The ruler should (and must) use any means, no matter how vile or wicked they appear to be to despose of his enemies and keep his subjects in line. Machiavelli also thought that all men were controlled by selfishness; all they wanted was personal power and riches. Machiavelli's name has long stood for what is evil and treacherous in statesmanship. But are Niccolo Machiavelli's ideas so different from so many leaders' of the past and even the present? No. The past ~~is~~ filled with leaders who practiced Machiavellianism. Some of the finest examples of leaders who believed in Machiavelli's theory of "the end justifies the means" are found in fairly recent history. Two very notable examples are Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Both would stop at nothing in order to reach their goals. Both leaders killed millions of innocent people to help them realize

their dreams. Lives meant nothing to Hitler if they stood in his way of world domination and Aryan purity, nor did they to Stalin in his quest for communism. It is interesting to note that although Hitler failed, Stalin apparently succeeded. Another good example, while not as extreme as the previous ones, but Machiavellian none the less, can be found right here in our own country-- our thirty-seventh president Richard Milhouse Nixon. Nixon broke the very laws he had pledged to support (and in fact stood for) in an attempt to keep himself at the head of this country. But unfortunately for Nixon, the concept of "the end justifies the means" is not acceptable behavior for an American leader. Even examples in modern-day religions can be found. A good example deals with the religion that is headquartered right here in Salt Lake City, the Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons. The Latter-Day Saints own a local television station, KSL-Channel Five, which shows many programs that are in direct conflict with their morals. (A fine example can be found in the very popular television show Dallas). By running these programs, KSL keeps its CBS affiliation, and therefore, its station. Obviously the LDS church feels its end justifies its means. The end, which is making money and keeping a propaganda weapon which is useful in spreading the word about their religion,

justifies the means, which is showing television programs that theoretically violate the morals of their religion. This brings us to another thesis of Machiavelli's: "All men are prompted exclusively by motives of self-interest, particularly by desires for personal power and material prosperity." I don't know if this is true, but I do think our economic system pushes people towards that idea. I believe that capitalism actually encourages this concept! Capitalism makes us admire people who have acquired great fortunes, even if they obtained them by illegal and immoral means. And the same goes for companies and corporations. We respect ones that turn a healthy profit, no matter how many laws they break or bend on the road to it. Capitalism makes us want to strive to be like these individuals and companies. And, also illustrated by the examples above, capitalism also encourages "the end justifies the means." And since capitalism is based on greed, these Machiavellian concepts will become truer and truer. So maybe we can't hold former President Nixon totally responsible for his actions; the economic system that he was raised up to admire may be at fault. But I am not suggesting doing away with capitalism because it does breed these Machiavellian concepts, but rather just

stating what I feel.

All in all, Machiavelli's "the end justifies the means" concept is practiced widely and always has been. Some cases are more extreme than others, however. Machiavelli's thesis that all men are prompted exclusively by motives of self-interest, particularly by desires for personal power and material prosperity may be truer than some of us would like to think. And capitalism furthers these two concepts.

I hope that this paper has been enjoyable to read. It certainly was interesting to write. Thank you.

*Very enjoyable! Good, even if brief.  
And very well written.*

*(A) quality  
(BT) quantity*