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### An Exploration of Secular and Christian Political Thought

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# An Exploration of Secular and Christian Political Thought

An Honors Thesis  
Presented to  
The University Honors Program  
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by

Elizabeth S. Bradley

**Accepted by the Honors Faculty**

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## **Abstract**

Through the evaluation and comparison of Machiavellian, Nietzschean, and Christian political thought, this thesis argues that Christian thinkers effectively meet the challenges posed to them by Modern philosophers. Modern philosophers reject the teaching that ethical principles have a transcendent origin in God and instead believe that morality is merely a matter of human convention. Christian philosophy was once dominant in influencing political thought. Modern thinkers such as Machiavelli and Nietzsche wrote with the express purpose of challenging and replacing Christian thought. The Christian political tradition promotes more noble qualities in leaders than the modern philosophies which proposed to challenge it. Unlike Nietzschean and Machiavellian philosophy, the Christian political tradition comes from a myriad of thinkers. The Christian political thought is here represented by Thomas Aquinas, Desiderius Erasmus, and Richard Hooker. Each political philosophy is evaluated based on the teaching concerning the goal and purpose of political power, the timing and execution of war, and the education of rulers and citizens.

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## Introduction

Aristotle observed that “mankind by nature is a political animal.”<sup>1</sup> The discussion of political power and how it should be used is a topic of great importance to all mankind. Man is the only creature which has the capability to contemplate and deliberate the use of political power.<sup>2</sup> This means that since we have been given the ability to contemplate these things it is our duty to do so. Over time Christian political tradition has greatly informed this deliberation, so much so that in the modern era many philosophers sought to challenge it. Machiavelli and Nietzsche teach that selfishness and corruption are acceptable in a political leader. These philosophers also teach that a leader should operate with a different standard of morality than the common person. I will argue that Christian political tradition effectively meets these challenges. Christian thinkers argue that the ruler is considered an equal to the ruled and that selfishness is not to be encouraged. A Christian holds the ruler to an equal, if not greater, moral standard than the ruled. The standards to which Christian leaders aspire is morally noble, logical, and altruistic.

Machiavelli and Nietzsche each imply that there is a certain perfection that is possible on earth. Nietzsche teaches that a ruler will come who is greater than mankind, and they will force their view of the perfect world on those he rules.<sup>3</sup> As for Machiavelli, this may seem a strange interpretation of his thought. Machiavelli does teach that political goals should be low and achievable.<sup>4</sup> But there is an oddity to Machiavelli’s philosophy on this point. Despite his reaching for low and achievable goals, his teaching implies that if the ruler follows his instruction perfectly, there can be a perfect political stability.<sup>5</sup> This by no means is a perfect

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, "The Politics." tr. Carnes Lord. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 37.

<sup>2</sup> IBID

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York City: Penguin Books, 1976), 126-127.

<sup>4</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli. *The Prince* tr. Harvey C. Mansfield. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> IBID

society, but it is a call for the ruler to act and to deny their passions in a way that is almost superhuman. The idea is that if a ruler follows Machiavellian teaching, barring any freak accident of fate, the ruler will make the right decision every time. Machiavelli also teaches that the pursuit of self-preservation is the most important thing to a ruler, and that the ruler has license to do all he can to survive. The flaw in this thought is that if a ruler's goal is perfection, or perfect self-preservation, it is morally permissible to do anything to achieve that.

Another issue with Machiavelli is that, in many areas of rule, he aims too low. Machiavelli teaches that mankind cannot reach beyond low and achievable goals.<sup>6</sup> Things such as basic survival, political stability, and a festival or two per year are all that mankind is capable of achieving through political means. For Machiavelli, man's highest good is survival and self-preservation. Virtue and justice, to his way of thinking, are subordinate to necessity. Machiavelli does not take into account the need that man has to pursue truth, justice, or anything beyond physical necessity.<sup>7</sup>

A Christian philosopher in comparison is aware of the imperfectability of man and governance. This knowledge allows a Christian ruler to strive for what is best without attempting to force perfection on an imperfect world. This allows a ruler to have a moral standard and to focus on contemporary political issues rather than constantly attempting to achieve perfection. A Christian thinker, in comparison with Machiavelli, would argue that it is the duty of the leader to encourage the people to seek something beyond themselves. A Christian ruler recognizes that it is only through the attempt to strive for something beyond ourselves that we may achieve what is best in ourselves. A Christian is aware of the fact that mankind will never achieve perfection and

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<sup>6</sup> IBID

<sup>7</sup> IBID

will never create a perfect government. However, that does not discourage them, but rather spurns them to do the best they can to serve the people they rule.

Each philosophy will be analyzed based on their teaching about three separate political topics. The topics which will be discussed herein are not only those that are practically important in political rule, but also those which most vividly display the attitude of the leader towards his people. The purpose and goals of political power will explain how each philosopher believes power should be used, and who it should most benefit. The execution and timing of wars will explore what the philosopher believes about the value of human life and the circumstances under which life can and should be risked. Finally, the education of rulers and citizens displays the level of respect the philosopher has for the consciousness of mankind. From each political goal stems the ruler's attitude towards his people, and the way they should be treated as citizens and as human beings.

It could be objected that I should either choose one Christian thinker or that I should use a wider variety of Christian thinkers. The aim here is to demonstrate that Christian thought produces a cohesive political tradition. More than one thinker is discussed because the goal is to capture the fullness of the Christian political tradition. Furthermore, Christian thought by nature is the product of many minds over many years, nationalities, and denominations. Thomas Aquinas was specifically chosen because of his contributions to Christian political tradition concerning the purpose of political leadership, and just war theory. Erasmus was chosen because of his contribution on the topic of education. Richard Hooker is cited due to his writings on the topic of natural rights. Through the exploration of this composite of Christian thinkers, dominant themes on the topic of Christian leadership can be brought to the surface.



## On the Purpose and Goals of Political Power

In order to understand the reasoning behind the teachings of political philosophers, their particular belief about the purposes and goals of political leadership must be understood. There are four necessary questions to address when it comes to the purpose and goals of political power. One must address why political rule is necessary, where the authority for political rule comes from, what the goals of the ruler should be, and what is permissible for a leader to do to accomplish these goals. Nietzsche, Machiavelli, and Christian philosophers each have a unique view of the topic of leadership, and their explorations of the aforementioned questions have a deep impact on the rest of their political philosophy.

The main point that all three philosophies agree upon is the need for some type of ruler, though they disagree about why this is. Nietzsche argues that mankind must be ruled by those who are born superior so that we can bridge the gap between man and the Overman.<sup>8</sup> Machiavelli believes that people need to be ruled because someone has to have the authority to do morally questionable things for the self-interest of the political body.<sup>9</sup> A Christian thinker states that people must be ruled politically because they are created to be in community with one another, and all communities need some sort of political structure in order to function.<sup>10</sup>

The next major question upon which these philosophies disagree is where the authority to rule originates. Nietzsche writes that the authority to rule comes from the Will to Power, which is the will of the ruler to impose their societal vision on the people they rule.<sup>11</sup> Machiavelli writes that the authority to rule is based in merit, and the ruler's ability to obtain and keep power.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, 126-127.

<sup>9</sup> Machiavelli, "*The Prince*"

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, in "*On Law, Morality, and Politics*", ed. William P. Baumgarth and Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company).

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Antichrist." in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York City: Penguin Books, 1976), 568.

<sup>12</sup> Machiavelli, "*The Prince*"

Machiavelli and Nietzsche are similar in that they both believe that the authority to rule is vested in some characteristic of the ruler. A Christian thinker will diverge here, because for Christian philosophers the authority to rule comes from God's divine will.

Once questions of reason and authority are answered, the next logical question is what the goals of the ruler should be. Nietzsche sees the goal of leadership as the creation of a society that looks and functions exactly as the ruler would have it.<sup>13</sup> Machiavelli writes that the goal of the leader is to remain in power and to pursue the true self-interest of themselves and the people.<sup>14</sup> Like Machiavelli, a Christian thinker teaches that the goal of political power is to pursue the good of the governed.<sup>15</sup> A Christian will diverge from Machiavellian thought in that a Christian ruler will put the people above himself, whereas a Machiavellian ruler will always choose their personal self-interest.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, one must ask what is permissible for the ruler to do in order to achieve these goals. Nietzsche teaches that all moral authority is vested in the ruler himself.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, any and all action is permissible in the pursuit of achieving the goals of the ruler. Machiavelli writes that while there is no moral principle to stop a ruler from making dubious decisions, there is a logical one. Machiavelli says that a ruler must not inflict unnecessary cruelty on the people because it is not in the best interest of the ruler. Christian thinkers agree with Machiavelli in that unnecessary cruelty is wrong, but the Christian takes it a step farther. A Christian thinker says that a ruler must abide by Christian morality and ethics in all that they do.

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<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *"Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*

<sup>14</sup> Machiavelli, *"The Prince"*

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *"On Law, Morality, and Politics"*

<sup>16</sup> IBID

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *"The Antichrist"*

Nietzsche states that the human race as a whole has entered a period of decline. Nietzsche believes that humanity has become weak, cultureless, uninventive, and complacent.<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche does not see humanity as an end, but merely a bridge to something greater.<sup>19</sup> In many of his works Nietzsche speaks of the decline of humanity as the signal of the end of mankind's reign over the world. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche uses the visual of a tightrope walker to describe humanity in its decline.<sup>20</sup> The tightrope walker is simply there to amuse the masses, and he is doing nothing original. In fact, the performance of the tightrope walker interrupts Zarathustra's speech to the people about the decline of mankind. Ultimately, the tightrope walker, a mere man, attempts to walk the bridge that is meant for the Overman, and he falls to a brutal and humiliating death. This is how Nietzsche views the majority of mankind. When a common man attempts to achieve things beyond our capability (such as superior knowledge) we are doomed to fail in a humiliating and agonizing way.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, Nietzsche does not believe that mankind should be ruled by one of our own, but rather by the Overman. For Nietzsche, the Overman is a being who is superior to humanity and is the next logical step of evolution.<sup>22</sup> Man is a thing to be surpassed, and the Overman will be the ones who do it. In much of Nietzsche's work, and especially in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it is always shortly after he explains that god is dead that he describes the Overman as if they are a sort of god. The Overman is described in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a sea that can absorb the polluted stream of humanity without becoming tarnished. Furthermore, the Overman is unencumbered by human morality but instead invents a morality unto himself. According to

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<sup>18</sup> Werner J. Dannhauser, "*History of Political Philosophy*", ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 827.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 126-127.

<sup>20</sup> IBID., 131-32.

<sup>21</sup> IBID., 152.

<sup>22</sup> IBID., 124-126

Nietzsche this morality will be something new and that is based in personal desires, feelings, and creativity. The function of the Overman is not just to usher mankind out, but also to usher in something completely unfamiliar.

According to Nietzsche mankind requires a ruler or a group of rulers because mankind is in decline. Society as a whole is sick and it needs to be healed or fixed.<sup>23</sup> For Nietzsche, leadership is necessary in order to usher in a drastic change to humanity so that creativity and culture may once again flourish.<sup>24</sup> The Overman is the next necessary step in evolution, and mankind must be ruled by them because they are superior. Nietzsche states that the Overman will one day look upon humanity the way humans today look upon apes.<sup>25</sup> In comparison to the Overman, mankind will be no more than merely an animal species. For Nietzsche the Overman must conquer and rule over humanity so that there can be a reevaluation of all values and so that the world may once again progress instead of laying stagnant.<sup>26</sup>

According to Nietzsche, the authority to lead comes from two places. The authority to lead first comes from natural superiority.<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche does not believe in the equality of man. He writes that some persons and races are better than others, and that the Overman is superior to them all. Superiority for Nietzsche is all encompassing. This does not merely mean superiority of the intellect, but of physical strength and emotional capacity as well. Most of all Nietzsche values superior creativity.<sup>28</sup> In the preface to the *Antichrist* Nietzsche explains that his writing, and thus the power he writes about within, belongs to the very few. He goes on to describe the

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<sup>23</sup> Dannhauser, 829.

<sup>24</sup> Dannhauser, 835.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, 125.

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "Twilight of The Idols." in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York City: Penguin Books, 1976), 465.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 568.

<sup>28</sup> Dannhauser, 834.

kind of superior being that would understand his book. He ends this preface with “Such men alone are my readers, my right readers, my predestined readers: what matter the rest? The rest—that is merely mankind.”<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche continues on to explain that the authority to lead comes from the Will to Power. In the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche describes all good as the will to power, and power itself.<sup>30</sup> For Nietzsche, the authority to rule rests in one's desire for power combined with their ability to obtain it. He teaches within this a certain ruthlessness and a disdain for the weak. Not only does Nietzsche love the superior, but he despises the inferior and all who take pity on the inferior.<sup>31</sup> For Nietzsche, part of the will to power is the ability to get rid of the things and people that make society weak. Nietzsche believes that a good leader seeks “Not contentedness but more power; not peace but war; not virtue but fitness.”<sup>32</sup> For Nietzsche, the authority to rule comes from natural superiority, a deep desire for power, and the ability to gain power through any means. Add to this a lack of conventional morality and a brand-new vision for the direction of mankind as a whole and you have Nietzsche's perfect leader, the Overman.

The goals of a Nietzschean leader consist of the complete secularization of society, the reevaluation of all values, and the revitalization of culture and creativity. Mankind as a race is sickly, weak, and on its last legs. Mankind no longer produces anything new, and mediocrity is celebrated far beyond talent or heroics. There is no place for the naturally superior to shine, and the weak in society are pitied and coddled. For Nietzsche, the true purpose of leadership is to change all of that.<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche's belief is that if culture is properly cultivated, government and law as it is now will become obsolete. In fact, having a written law itself is proof of a societal

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, 569.

<sup>30</sup> *IBID.*, 570.

<sup>31</sup> *IBID.*, 572-573.

<sup>32</sup> *IBID.*, 570

<sup>33</sup> Dannhauser., 841-842

and cultural failure. For Nietzsche the purpose of leadership and of the Overman is to fundamentally change the way the society of the world functions. Conventional religion and morality are to be done away with in favor of the creative will of the Overman. The culture and creativity of the world will once again be vibrant, and law and government will cease to be necessary because they will be replaced by mores and strict social standards. Human life will be rightfully seen as expendable and unequal, and the Overman will see to it that the old order of humanity does not return. This is the ultimate goal of a true Nietzschean leader.

In order for these goals to be achieved, someone of superior intellect must first read, comprehend, and act upon Nietzsche's writing. After which the ruler may make the necessary changes to society according to their own will and by any means necessary.<sup>34</sup> This change, according to Nietzsche, must include the destruction of false idols such as god, science, History, etc. and the reconstruction of society as something new entirely. The lives of humans will not be of value to a true Nietzschean leader. The creative vision of the ruler is to be valued above all else when structuring the new society that Nietzsche writes of. In *The Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes, "Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches- and in punishment there is so much that is festive."<sup>35</sup> Here it is clearly seen that Nietzsche does not simply view cruelty as necessary in certain situations, but he views it as something that a leader may rightfully take pleasure in. A Nietzschean ruler is given an extremely difficult task to perform, but they are ultimately allowed to take any action, necessary or not, in order to achieve their creative vision and societal goals.

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<sup>34</sup> IBID

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals." in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter O. Kaufman (New York City: Vintage Books).

Machiavelli does not address the reasons for political rule but begins pragmatically with the knowledge that it is necessary. Machiavellian advice to leaders stems from the assumption that a leader must work from a set of virtues and standards that is different from that of the ruled.<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli teaches that the prince may sometimes have to do things that are not traditionally virtuous in order to achieve the best consequence for himself and his people. Yet, Machiavelli insists that the prince appear to be traditionally virtuous and to encourage the ruled to be traditionally virtuous. Were everyone to play fast and loose with morality, society would descend into chaos. Therefore, for Machiavelli there must be a leader because there must be someone who is allowed to do what is best, even if that best is not traditionally virtuous. With this unique Machiavellian set of virtues, a leader is free to use cruelty well, manipulate the masses, and generally do what is necessary for the good of the nation, whether his actions are morally upright or not.<sup>37</sup>

Machiavelli believes that the authority to rule comes primarily from the ruler's ability to remain in power. This is another topic that Machiavelli does not address directly. Machiavelli wrote within a political system based on birthright, and as such he focused more on the how of rule than the why. Machiavelli teaches that a ruler must be well versed in history, be able to be both feared and loved by the people and should not overtax the people.<sup>38</sup> These points are so prevalent and important in Machiavelli's teaching because those are the qualities that help a ruler remain in power. Machiavelli's writing meaningfully broke away from the societal standards of his day. His writing promotes merit and does not presuppose that a ruler has a right to power simply because they were born to a high position. Machiavelli wrote during a time of great

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<sup>36</sup> Machiavelli, 69-70.

<sup>37</sup> IBID

<sup>38</sup> IBID., 22, 62-68.

political instability in his own country of Italy and much of his advice is aimed to keep one leader in power long enough to create political stability.

Machiavelli writes that the goal of the ruler is to foster a political environment that promotes a comfortable lifestyle for the people, that promotes and celebrates excellence in art and virtue, and that promotes the overall good of the nation as a whole. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli states “A prince should show himself a lover of the virtues, giving recognition to virtuous men, and he should honor those who are excellent in an art.”<sup>39</sup> Machiavelli writes under the assumption that what is good for the people and what is good for the leader are synonymous. He believes that the true self-interest of all men is one and the same, and if the prince is to truly know and act in his own self-interest, the true self interest of the people will be done as well. While Machiavelli’s teachings about gaining and keeping power are ruthless in nature, they stem from the idea that political stability is key and should be prioritized.

Machiavelli also teaches that the ruler should ally himself with the common people over the great. Machiavelli’s philosophy here stems from the political functions of the many, the few, and the one. The Prince being the one, must align himself with the many over the few. The many, or the common people have their strength in numbers. The few, or those who are rich and highborn, are the prince’s competition. Furthermore, the desires of the many are far more noble than the desires of the few. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli says “for the end of the people is more decent than that of the great, since the great want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed.”<sup>40</sup> This shows that though Machiavelli teaches that a ruler should be feared, they should not be oppressive or unnecessarily cruel. When one really looks into the advice Machiavelli gives, cruelties are rarely ever committed against the people. Machiavelli’s most

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<sup>39</sup> IBID., 91.

<sup>40</sup> IBID., 39.



shocking, cruel, and infamous advice is not directed toward the people at all, but rather towards the nobility or towards foreign threats. This shows that Machiavelli's political goal is for the good of the many and the ruler, and if necessary, at the expense of the few.

Machiavelli walks a fine moral line when it comes to how to achieve these political goals. Machiavellian advice is full of manipulation, cruelty, murder, and lies. However, these things are not to be done lightly nor without forethought. Machiavelli believes that there is a portion of life over which man can have control and a portion of life over which man has no control. While it is possible and even likely that every man suffers a malignity of fortune at some point, Machiavelli maintains that man should do what he can to control fortune. Much of Machiavelli's advice involves the leader being able to think ahead, understand the long-term consequences of his actions, and control fortune as much as possible, no matter the moral implications. Machiavelli teaches that cruelty can be well used or ill-used. If cruelty is necessary, it should be done all at once, it should be shown in such a way to create fear but not hatred, and it should not be continuously repeated.<sup>41</sup> If cruelty is committed in this way, it logically serves the purposes of the ruler and it is acceptable.

This is a sharp contrast between Nietzsche and Machiavelli. Nietzsche teaches cruelty without purpose and Machiavelli teaches cruelty with purpose and with very specific rules. Another thing which Machiavelli teaches as permissible for a leader is deception. This can be seen in his teachings on promises well and badly broken, his teaching on the fox and the lion, and his teaching on religion among others. Machiavelli's teaching on promises is that the ruler is not required to keep a promise that does not benefit him. However, the ruler must weigh the power and influence of the person to whom the promise was made. If the breaking of a promise

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<sup>41</sup> IBID

would serve to create a powerful enemy the promise should be kept no matter the short-term inconvenience.<sup>42</sup> Machiavelli also teaches the lion and the fox, in which a fox purposefully hides their power so that they can gain more through manipulation.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Machiavelli's teaching on religion is that there is no higher power for the ruler to submit to, but the ruler should act as if there is in public. If the ruler displays piety, it makes them more popular with the common people, and it promotes moral virtue within society. While the ruler has no need for a higher power, Machiavelli acknowledges that the people need something to believe in, and that society must be bound by a certain set of moral virtues.<sup>44</sup>

The Christian view is that man was created to be part of a community, and communities need to be governed. Aquinas says, "If there be a group of people, with each one looking solely after his own interest, that group would break up into many parts... just as the body of a man or of any animal would fall apart unless there were some general ruling principles in the body which has as its interest the common good of all the members."<sup>45</sup> There must be a leader because where there is a group, there must be someone looking out for the common interest of that group. In comparison with the anarchy that came before, Hooker writes "To take away all such mutual grievances, injuries, and wrongs, there was no way, but only by growing into composition... by ordaining some kind of government public, and by yielding themselves subject thereunto... by them peace, tranquility, and happy estate of the rest might be procured."<sup>46</sup> This principle is seen throughout Christian history, and in fact throughout human history as a whole.

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<sup>42</sup> IBID

<sup>43</sup> IBID

<sup>44</sup> IBID

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "*On Law, Morality, and Politics*"

<sup>46</sup> Richard Hooker, "Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity," in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Arthur S. McGrade, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Human beings naturally create hierarchies, political systems, and governments because without them we cannot make progress. This is due to the fact that human beings are created to be a part of the body of Christ, which is a community with God as the head. People are all created with individual talents, desires, and dreams.<sup>47</sup> However, these individual qualities cannot be cultivated or appreciated alone. In Christian theology and Philosophy, there are many institutions which mirror man's relationship with God. Common examples include marriage and parent-child relationships. Political leadership is another such mirror. People were created to live in a community that is ruled by God, and the earthly mirror of that is seen in political leadership. This places an extraordinary burden on the ruler to lead in a Christlike way.

According to Christian tradition, the authority to lead comes from God. This does not mean that only the faithful Christian rulers or the especially benevolent rulers are put in place by God. Rather, it means that every political leader is ordained by God to be in that position of power for an allotted amount of time. This assertion naturally begs the question of why God would allow bad leadership and cruel leadership in the world. The most comprehensive reply to this is that people possess free will. This means that leaders have a special responsibility to their subjects, and they can choose whether to take that responsibility as an opportunity to do what is good or as an opportunity to get what they want. However, this does not mean that there is no punishment for bad leadership. In *Treatise on the Virtues*, Aquinas says, "If in fact, his rule is directed, not to the common good of the group, but to the private advantage of the ruler, that will be a rule both unjust and perverse; wherefore the Lord warns such rulers through Ezekiel, saying, 'woe to the Shepherds who feed themselves.'"<sup>48</sup> This shows that while all leaders are ordained

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Cor. 12:12-25

<sup>48</sup> Aquinas, 265.

by God to be in that position of power, not all leaders act in a way that God desires or approves of.

In *The Education of a Christian Prince* Erasmus writes, “A body of subjects elects to submit to the rule of a prince on the strict understanding that all his actions will be for their communal good.”<sup>49</sup> Much like a Machiavellian ruler, a Christian ruler seeks to act in the interest of communal good. However, a Christian ruler goes beyond that and has a slightly different definition of communal good. According to Erasmus it is only when a man gives himself over to the good of the state, has communion with and listens to God, and puts the good of his nation above his own personal desires that he has the right to be called prince.<sup>50</sup> The goals of a Christian ruler are to protect the welfare of the people, to be a virtuous and Godly example to the people, and to protect the God given rights of the people.

A Christian leader also has a goal that they share with every other Christian, which is to glorify God in all that they do. This means that every political decision, every public statement, and every law must be filtered through the lens of Christian virtue. If a ruler acts in a way that is oppressive, cruel, or selfish they are not performing a vital part of their task as a leader. It is important to note that the goal of a Christian leader is not to forcibly make those who they rule agree with their religious beliefs. Rather, they are supposed to lead by example, show Godly virtues through their actions, and speak boldly about their faith.

Erasmus makes a clear distinction between those who claim Christianity and those who are truly Christian. “Who is a true Christian? Not just someone who is Baptized or confirmed or who goes to mass: rather it is someone who has embraced Christ in the depths of his heart and

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<sup>49</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, "The Education of a Christian Prince," in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Lisa Jardine (Cambridge University Press).

<sup>50</sup> IBID

who expresses this by acting in a Christian spirit.”<sup>51</sup> In order to achieve their political goals, Christians must still abide by God’s law and must act in a Christian spirit. While there are situations politically that would be more easily handled without the standard of Christian morality, the results are better in the long run when Christian virtue is followed. This is because Christian virtues consist of a balance between extremes. Thomas Aquinas sees moral virtues as trifold, with vice on either side where there is an extreme, and virtue in the middle where there is compromise, balance and moderation. For example, cowardice and rashness are two extremes or vices of the virtue of courage.

The chief virtue of a leader is prudence, which is the ability to take a general rule and apply it to a specific situation so as to come up with the best possible results.<sup>52</sup> Political leaders spend their lives making difficult decisions, and it is necessary for a leader who intends to rule with Christian morals to possess the virtue of prudence. Nietzsche and Machiavelli both explore how far they can morally bend the rules in a tough political situation. A Christian thinker in comparison does not seek to know what a leader can get away with or what the easiest course of action is, but rather what the best possible course of action is in a given situation. Christians are unencumbered by the seeking of comfort or the easiest way out of a situation and are used to doing things the hard way. Therefore, unlike secular political philosophies, Christian thought promotes looking for the right response above looking for the easiest or most comfortable response. This also shows that Christian leaders are not to be self-serving but should be willing to make personal sacrifices for the good of their nation.

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<sup>51</sup> IBID., 18.

<sup>52</sup> Aquinas, 265.

## On the Timing and Execution of Wars

An important aspect of any political philosophy is how the philosopher proposes a ruler should handle the issue of war. This is not only practically or strategically important, but it demonstrates the moral character of the philosopher's desired ruler. The issue of war also reveals the level at which each philosophy values human life. There are three primary questions concerning the issue of war that most philosophies explore. The first major question is what the purpose of war is, then when it is permissible for a ruler to engage in war, and how a ruler may conduct themselves in wartime.

Nietzsche and Machiavelli agree on the purpose of war, but only in that they believe that war is the natural state of the world, and that peace serves as a means to new war.<sup>53</sup> However, Nietzsche believes that the point of war is to sort out the ordinary men from the extraordinary men. Nietzsche sees war as a good and an end in itself. Conversely, Machiavelli believes that war is necessary and natural, but that it should not be sought. For Machiavelli, the purpose of war is to ultimately bring political stability.<sup>54</sup> A Christian thinker differs from both Nietzsche and Machiavelli on this topic. Christian thought concerning warfare hinges on the belief that war is a means to peace, which is natural.<sup>55</sup> Aquinas writes that the purpose of war is to bring peace and to stop evildoers. On this point Machiavelli can be seen as the middle ground between a Christian thinker and Nietzsche. Because Machiavelli both believes that war is that natural state of things, and that the purpose of war is to bring about some good.

The next issue that must be discussed is when it is permissible for a ruler to engage in war. Nietzsche writes that it is always permissible for a ruler to engage in war. Nietzsche

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<sup>53</sup> Machiavelli, "The Prince"

<sup>54</sup> Machiavelli, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "On Law, Morality, and Politics"

believes that war is a good in itself, and therefore sees peace as a failure of the ruler.<sup>56</sup> The way Nietzsche views war is reckless in nature, because the focus of the ruler is not on the quality of life for the average citizen, but on the celebration of the extraordinary citizen. Machiavelli writes that a ruler should engage in war when it is inevitable, and when it is most convenient for the ruler. A war is most likely won if the battles are fought on the ruler's terms. Therefore, the timing of war must be chosen tactically.<sup>57</sup> The Christian view of war is similar in that the war must be fought as a last resort and that the ruler should choose the timing of war. Thomas Aquinas presents specific qualifications for the conduct of just war, but also recognizes that once those qualifications are met it is imperative that the war is won.<sup>58</sup> The main difference between a Christian thinker and Machiavelli on the timing of war is the reasoning behind it. Machiavelli's reasoning is strictly logical and consequentialist, whereas the Christian view is based in Christian morality.

Finally, these philosophies cover the way in which a ruler can and should conduct themselves during a war. Nietzsche teaches that cruelty is one of the benefits of war. Nietzsche lacks reverence for human life, and therefore puts no limit on what the ruler is allowed to do during war.<sup>59</sup> Machiavelli teaches that a ruler must use cruelty well. This means that necessary cruelty must be done quickly and all at once.<sup>60</sup> By doing this, Machiavelli teaches that the ruler will be able to be both feared and loved by the people and will therefore be able to remain in power.<sup>61</sup> Christian tradition dictates that a ruler must follow Christian ethic in matters of war and peace alike. This means that a Christian ruler must not enact any cruelty that is not strictly

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<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, 159

<sup>57</sup> Machiavelli., 42

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "*On Law, Morality, and Politics*"

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

<sup>60</sup> Machiavelli, 59

<sup>61</sup> IBID

necessary to win a war. This also means that a Christian ruler should not use manipulative tactics such as espionage in order to win a war. These three philosophies differ on this question because each philosophy views human life with a different level of reverence.

Nietzsche, Machiavelli, and a Christian thinker all have a unique take on the issue of war. Nietzsche tends to celebrate war, and his teaching about war takes a rather reckless tone.<sup>62</sup> Machiavelli sees war as an inevitable and necessary thing, that should be handled with great care.<sup>63</sup> Contrary to popular belief, Christian philosophy of war does not hinge on pacifism, but instead teaches that war should be handled by a legitimate authority, with the proper intentions, and for a moral purpose.<sup>64</sup> The underlying difference between these three philosophies on the topic of war is their level of reverence concerning human life. Another underlying difference stems from the philosopher's diametrically opposed views about the purpose of government.

For Nietzsche war is not so much a means to an end, but an end in itself. Nietzsche cites that there are certain benefits to war that make it an acceptable goal for a leader. Nietzsche says that war is an opportunity for great men to rise through the ranks of society, and to demonstrate their superiority.<sup>65</sup> In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche states that “Without cruelty there is no festival: thus the longest and most ancient part of human history teaches- and in punishment there is so much that is festive.”<sup>66</sup> Here we see clearly that Nietzsche's beliefs about war are generally congruent with his belief about cruelty and suffering in general. Nietzsche believes that there can be no celebration without a certain level of cruelty. In a situation such as war, cruelty and celebration go hand in hand, as the victors are ultimately those who were able to take the

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<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, 159.

<sup>63</sup> Machiavelli, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “*On Law, Morality, and Politics*”

<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, “*On the Genealogy of Morals*”



most human life. From this perspective it is clear why Nietzsche is in favor of war. Other philosophies tend to agree that there needs to be some reason for war, whereas Nietzsche believes that the commencement of war is reason enough to begin one. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes “You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause.”<sup>67</sup> This quote perfectly summarizes Nietzsche’s overarching view of the concept of war.

For Nietzsche war is acceptable at any time that the ruler sees fit. Nietzsche teaches that war should be something sought and engaged in often. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes, “You should have eyes that always seek an enemy- your enemy.”<sup>68</sup> This demonstrates that a true Nietzschean ruler will always seek new wars, new enemies, and new lands to conquer. However, the distinction must be made that the war is not about conquering so much as it is about the fighting itself. Nietzsche teaches that toil and suffering are ends in and of themselves and sees war as a conveniently inconvenient process by which to achieve these goals.<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that “You should love peace as a means to new wars- and the short peace more than the long.”<sup>70</sup> For Nietzsche it is always acceptable to engage in a new war, while it is only acceptable to achieve peace for a short period of time. Moreover, peace is considered primarily as a time to prepare for new wars.

This is in direct opposition to both Machiavellian and Christian philosophies on when it is acceptable to engage in war. A Christian thinker here takes a moral stand against superfluous war in favor of nonviolent attempts at peace.<sup>71</sup> Machiavelli disagrees here on the principle that

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<sup>67</sup> Nietzsche, “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*”

<sup>68</sup> IBID

<sup>69</sup> IBID

<sup>70</sup> IBID

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Aquinas, “*On Law, Morality, and Politics*”

war is hard on the economy and on the common person and is therefore not usually conducive to supporting the good of the state or the prince.<sup>72</sup> This topic specifically shows the drastic difference between Nietzschean philosophy and other popular political philosophies. The difference being that other political philosophers are bound by some sort of moral or logical law, whereas Nietzsche is unencumbered by these things. Nietzsche teaches that war should be waged no matter the consequences, moral repercussions, or logical reasons not to.<sup>73</sup>

Nietzsche's philosophy about how one should conduct war is as unencumbered by morals and logic as his philosophy on the reasoning and timing of war. A Nietzschean ruler, the Overman, is supposed to be born superior to the rest of mankind. Therefore, the Overman has no moral obligation to protect the lives of human beings. Nietzsche does not believe that human life has intrinsic value. According to Nietzsche, humanity is one link in a long evolutionary chain.<sup>74</sup> There is nothing particularly special about mankind, and therefore human life has no more intrinsic value than that of a mosquito. And since human life does not have intrinsic value, the Overman can dispose of and inflict pain on any and every person they choose. The purpose of the overman is to mold the human race into whatever form he wishes, and to do so by any means necessary or un. There is a certain Darwinism about Nietzsche's philosophy of war. Those who are born superior, those who have elite intellect and physical ability, will survive and thrive in a time of war. Whereas those who are born inferior, those who are weak by Nietzsche's standards and who hold on to idols will ultimately suffer and die in a time of war.<sup>75</sup>

For Nietzsche, in war there is no cruelty that goes too far, there is no action that should not be taken, and there is no reason for mercy so long as the Overman achieves his ultimate goal

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<sup>72</sup> Machiavelli, *"The Prince"*

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, *"On the Genealogy of Morals"*

<sup>74</sup> Nietzsche, *"Thus Spoke Zarathustra"*

<sup>75</sup> IBID

and vision for the human race. It is easier when addressing the Nietzschean view of war to ask what it is not permissible for a leader to do than to ask what it is permissible for a leader to do. For Nietzsche it is permissible for a ruler, the Overman, to do whatever he likes so long as it stems from his own ego and will to power.<sup>76</sup> In *Twilight of the Idols* Nietzsche writes “But an attack on the roots of passion means an attack on the roots of life.”<sup>77</sup> Here it is made clear that any action that is motivated by a sense of morality or loyalty outside the self, and the passion of the self, is never permissible and is especially not permissible in a state of war.

Machiavelli sees war as a thing that is inevitable and unavoidable. For Machiavelli, war is not so much a thing with purpose as a thing that happens that leaders then have to address. Machiavelli does not teach that a ruler should never start a war, but rather teaches that the decision to begin a war must be carefully calculated. Machiavelli teaches that war should not be a thing that is consistently sought, and that war should be avoided as much as possible. One overarching theme of Machiavelli’s teaching is that a ruler should try as best they can to have control over their political situation. War, by nature is a situation in which there are many variables and control is difficult to obtain and keep. If a ruler is to go to war, the purpose of that war is to end it as quickly and painlessly as possible.<sup>78</sup> Machiavelli recognizes that war is generally not good for the people or the prince.

This is not to say that a Machiavellian leader should not concern themselves with war. On the contrary, Machiavelli states in *The Prince*, “Therefore, he (the prince) should never lift his thoughts from the exercise of war, and in peace he should exercise it more than in war.”<sup>79</sup> Here we see that even in times of peace, a Machiavellian ruler must be well prepared for the coming

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<sup>76</sup> IBID

<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche, 487.

<sup>78</sup> Machiavelli, 59.

<sup>79</sup> IBID

of war. It is not that war is morally wrong, or that it is altogether unnecessary, but that war should be well prepared for. Machiavelli teaches that cruelty can be a good thing, so long as it is well used. In *The Prince* he states “I believe that this comes from cruelties badly used or well used. Those can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can.”<sup>80</sup> This clearly exemplifies Machiavelli’s consequentialist nature, and moreover demonstrates his attitude concerning war. In a more local sense, cruelties well used may be a small series of well-planned assassinations. However, this teaching more broadly applies to war in that the prince should do what he can to ensure that war is fought efficiently. Furthermore, he should conduct war in whatever time and place is strategically best for him and with as little damage to the prince’s populace as possible.<sup>81</sup>

For Machiavelli, the timing of wars is extremely important, but the avoidance of war (insomuch as it is possible through Machiavellian virtue) is far more important. In Chapter X of *The Prince* Machiavelli uses the cities of Germany as an example of those who are so well prepared for war that no one dares attack them. The cities he writes of have high walls, deep moats, stored up food enough for a year, and were well defended. These cities also had a trained military of their own, so that they would not have to become indebted to anyone or hire disloyal mercenary soldiers. Machiavelli says in this passage that “they do not fear either him or any other power around, because they are so well fortified that everyone thinks their capture would be toilsome and difficult.”<sup>82</sup> The main point here is to prevent a war before it becomes an issue.

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<sup>80</sup> IBID., 37.

<sup>81</sup> IBID., 58

<sup>82</sup> IBID., 43.

Machiavelli also teaches that a ruler should keep a well-trained army and should himself remain battle ready. While peace is a goal for a Machiavellian leader, this does not mean that peace is a time during which to be idle. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli says this concerning peace, “with his industry make capitols of them in order to be able to profit from them in adversities, so that when fortune changes, it will find him ready to resist them.”<sup>83</sup> Machiavelli advises that in times of peace a prince should survey his lands, and to do so with military advisors, so as to know in times of war how to best defend his land. Beyond this, the prince should keep his armies well-ordered and well trained, as well as keeping himself battle ready. Machiavelli is very clear about how and when a ruler should begin a war. Machiavelli teaches that when a ruler discovers that war is inevitable, he should start it quickly and at his own convenience, so as not to give the enemy an upper hand.<sup>84</sup>

A Machiavellian war is one in which most of the work is done before the fighting begins. Machiavelli teaches that war is something that a leader should be so prepared for that the war itself is not too much a strain. A Machiavellian ruler will keep a well-trained army, have defenses already in place, and will educate themselves both in the geography of his own land and in the history of wars.<sup>85</sup> As far as what is permissible for a ruler to do during war, Machiavelli teaches that a leader should look at the long-term effects each decision will have on his rule. The best example of this principle is his teaching on cruelties well or ill-used. Cruelties well used will be short and to the point. Well used cruelties are not drawn out and they are not cruel beyond absolute necessity.<sup>86</sup> Cruelties ill-used are either repeated frequently or are overly cruel so as to

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<sup>83</sup> IBID., 60.

<sup>84</sup> IBID

<sup>85</sup> IBID., 60

<sup>86</sup> IBID., 37

make the prince hated rather than simply feared.<sup>87</sup> A Machiavellian leader has a set of boundaries that they will not cross in war. Unlike the boundaries in Christian thought, Machiavellian boundaries are logical, not moral in nature.

For Machiavelli the value of human life is conditional. If a ruler calculates that the loss of one or a few people's lives will benefit the state in the long run, there is no moral reason not to sacrifice those people. Similarly, if someone poses a threat to the state there is no moral problem with killing them. In short, human life is only valuable so long as it does not impede the purposes of the state. Machiavelli's teaching on the conduct of war is that it must be done in an intelligent and calculated manner, not considering moral qualms nor the personal desires of the prince.<sup>88</sup> For Machiavelli war must be fought in a way that ensures as much political stability as possible, and he believes that the way to do that is through cold calculation.

The Christian view of war is not rooted in pacifism, but in a desire to bring peace or fight evil. Ecclesiastes 3:3 says that there is "a time to kill and a time to heal" and Ecclesiastes 3:8 says there is "a time for war and a time for peace."<sup>89</sup> This clearly shows that a Christian thinker does not automatically lean towards pacifism, nor will they support a causeless war. Christian philosophy dictates that there is a specific time to go to war, and a specific time to remain at peace. The ability to decide whether to remain at peace or go to war requires prudence, and a combined knowledge of Christian ethics and political history.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote extensively on the purpose and requirements for a just war. According to Aquinas in order for war to be just there are three requirements. The war must be conducted by a legitimate authority, it must begin due to a just cause, and it must be conducted

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<sup>87</sup> IBID

<sup>88</sup> IBID

<sup>89</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:3-8 (NIV)

for some noble purpose such as securing peace, punishing evildoers, or of uplifting the good.<sup>90</sup>

The first requirement of just war is that it must be conducted by a legitimate authority. A legitimate authority is someone who not only wields power, but whose responsibility it is to conduct war. A civilian citizen cannot declare war, nor can anyone in power whose duties do not explicitly include the execution of wars. A tyrant cannot conduct a just war, because by definition a tyrant gains political power without right.

The second requirement is that it must be conducted for the purpose of a just cause.<sup>91</sup> Unlike Nietzsche or Machiavelli, Aquinas requires that war have a specific and noble purpose. Augustine writes, “True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement or cruelty but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evildoers, and of uplifting the good.”<sup>92</sup> If a ruler makes the decision to go to war, there will be human lives lost. For a Christian ruler this is a heavy burden, and therefore will only be undertaken when it is absolutely necessary and with specific purpose. Morally, Aquinas teaches that if a poor consequence is the byproduct of a moral act then the act itself is not immoral. For example, if a ruler chooses to go to war for the purpose of securing peace and there is loss of human life, then the act of conducting war was not immoral in itself. The purpose of the war was actually to save life in the long term.

The third rule of just war expounds on the second and lays out specific examples of noble purposes.<sup>93</sup> If the war is conducted for the purpose of ensuring peace, and therefore will save lives and prevent violence in the long term it can be considered just. If a war is conducted for the

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<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, 221.

<sup>91</sup> IBID

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Aquinas, 221.

<sup>93</sup> IBID

purpose of punishing evildoers and preventing evil acts, then it can be considered just.<sup>94</sup> For example, the Allies went to war against Nazi Germany in order to defend themselves against an evil regime. Finally, if a war is conducted for the purpose of uplifting the good it can be considered just. The question here being, in what case can a war uplift the good? This is a point where it is important for a ruler to be able to exercise prudence and to discern what it means to uplift the good.

As previously stated in reference to Ecclesiastes 3, there is a time for everything under heaven, even for war. Within the Christian philosophy of rule, there is an appointed time for all things, including war. Therefore, it is up to the ruler to know how to best decide the timing of war and to know how to best go about it depending upon the specific situation. There is broad disagreement about whether or not a Christian ruler should be the first belligerent, and thus whether or not a Christian ruler can choose the timing of war. However, if one accepts just war Theory, it must logically follow that a Christian leader should prudently choose the timing of war.

According to Aquinas, once the requirements of just war theory are satisfied, most other decisions concerning war are up to the prudence of the ruler. Prudence is the ability to use the rules of morality and logic, and the knowledge of a particular situation to come up with the best possible solution for that situation. This means that the timing of war is ultimately up to the prudence of the ruler. This includes but is not limited to the question of preemptive strikes.<sup>95</sup> The philosophy of Christian rule is one of morals, but that does not make it one of foolishness. Once a ruler has fulfilled the requirements of just war, they are allowed to pick their battleground and to, if necessary, be the first belligerent. It is on this point that Machiavelli and Aquinas do agree.

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<sup>94</sup> IBID

<sup>95</sup> IBID



Despite their philosophical differences Machiavelli and Aquinas each come to the conclusion that the ability to choose the time and place of battle is extremely important to the success of a military campaign. This is because historically and logically, one is more likely to succeed in war when they are able to choose the time and place of battle. Because just war theory requires that war be conducted for the purpose of furthering good, defending against evil, or securing peace, it is imperative that the ruler be able to win the war. Because of the nature of just war, the ramifications of loss are extremely heavy, and it would be illogical to impede a Christian ruler on something as important as the timing of war.

For a Christian thinker human life is highly valued, and therefore there are moral constraints concerning the conduct of war. Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So, God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Traditional Christian worldview places high value on human life because of the belief that mankind is made in God’s image. Furthermore, they were created to have dominion over the rest of God’s creation. It is made abundantly clear in the Bible that murder is wrong, but it is also clear that not every taking of a human life is murder. This distinction, while difficult to discern, is primarily dependent upon intent.

Aquinas writes that if a person conducts a moral act for a moral purpose, and something bad happens as a consequence the act in itself is still not immoral. For example, if someone kills another person because they are angry with them, that is murder. However, if someone is attacked, and in the process of escaping their attacker they kill them, it is not murder. This is because in the first situation, the intent was to kill the other person, whereas in the second

situation the intent was rooted in self-defense. Therefore, the conduct of war is not something that a Christian ruler will take lightly. Unlike a Machiavellian or Nietzschean ruler, Christian rulers see human life as intrinsically valuable and will attempt to limit loss of life within the conduct of war. A Christian ruler will also limit suffering during the conduct of war, and will not permit torture, rape, or any other unnecessary cruelty.

## On the Education of Citizens and Rulers

The way rulers are educated prepares them to know what they should and should not do in the conduct of rule. Likewise, the education of a people plays a vital role in the kind of rule they are willing to accept. Nietzsche, Machiavelli, and a Christian thinker vary not only in what kind of education is encouraged, but who is to be educated. The main points of conflict concerning education that are addressed in most political philosophy are the purpose of education, who should be educated, and what they should be educated about.

For Nietzsche, the purpose of education differs considerably from Machiavellian and Christian thought. Nietzschean education is not about obtaining content specific knowledge or skills, but about destroying unnecessary knowledge and replacing it with one's own will.<sup>96</sup> By contrast Machiavelli promotes that rulers should be able to handle practical political situations drawing upon one's knowledge of the successes and failures of rulers in the past.<sup>97</sup> For the Christian ruler the most important thing is their relationship with God. After this, Christian education seeks to understand God's creation so that the understanding, relationship, and virtues previously learned may be applied to real world situations. Beyond the universal Christian education there is also a specific education that is promoted for certain vocations.

Nietzsche and Machiavelli agree that there is a moral education that is reserved for and specific to those who will rule. Nietzsche's work is written to a very specific audience. He writes in the search of the kind of person who will truly understand his writings, the Overman.<sup>98</sup> The sundry writings of Nietzsche, and the way in which he communicates his ideas are meant to filter through society to seek out and uncover the Overman. Reading Nietzsche's work is the only

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<sup>96</sup> Nietzsche, "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*"

<sup>97</sup> Machiavelli, "*The Prince*"

<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche, 569.

necessary education of the Overman. Machiavelli believes that the prince should be educated in a way uncommon to the people, because the prince will follow a morality that is different from the people.<sup>99</sup> While Machiavelli does not hide his teaching away, he believes that it is not useful to the common person, but only to those with political ambitions. A Christian thinker diverges from the other two thinkers here, because they encourage an education that is common to all people.<sup>100</sup> The moral education of Christian rulers and common people is fundamentally the same. The purpose of a Christian life is to know, love, and serve God. Therefore, all people must be given the means to educate themselves about God. Beyond this, there is a specialized education that is necessary for pastors, political figures, and a myriad of other vocations.

Nietzsche makes a striking break from the other philosophies on the question of what should be studied. He rejects historical education in order for political rulers to be creative and to pursue their unique vision. By creative Nietzsche means a godlike ability to generate wholly new things. Not only should the Overman avoid the study of history he should learn to remember what is useful and conveniently forget what is undesirable or harmful in his own life.<sup>101</sup> The reason for forgetting all previous gods, morals, history, and idols is to unleash one's own creative will. Machiavelli and a Christian thinker align on the importance of the study of history, especially for those in a position of political power. A Christian thinker and Machiavelli would also agree that a ruler must be educated in a certain set of morals. They diverge however, on what those morals should be. Machiavellian education holds the ruler to a lower moral standard than the common person, where a Christian education teaches that the ruler is held to a higher one.<sup>102</sup> A Christian thinker also takes this education farther, as they also encourage familiarity

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<sup>99</sup> Machiavelli, *"The Prince"*

<sup>100</sup> Erasmus, *"The Education of a Christian Prince"*

<sup>101</sup> Dannhauser., 841-842

<sup>102</sup> Machiavelli, *"The Prince"*; Erasmus, *"The Education of a Christian Prince."*

with the Bible, free thought, and knowledge for its own sake. These differences in philosophy all stem from the fundamental differences in the philosopher's beliefs about the purpose of education.

It is a delicate thing to discuss Nietzsche's philosophy on the purpose of education because it is vastly different from the way most people think of education. Traditional education serves the purpose of preparing someone for a specific purpose. Nietzsche rejects the idea of having specific purpose and sees telos as a false idol. For Nietzsche, education is not the acquisition of knowledge for any purpose, but rather the creation of the conditions necessary for the Overman to come into power.<sup>103</sup> Nietzschean education is specific to those who will understand him and consists of the remembrance of what needs be remembered and the forgetting of what must be forgotten.<sup>104</sup> A Nietzschean education does not seek to add anything to the Overman because the Overman is whole in himself. Instead, a Nietzschean education seeks to destroy all previous idols such as History, religion, telos, and science.<sup>105</sup>

Nietzsche does not seek to add to the knowledge of the Overman, but to destroy everything that would stand in the way of the power of the Overman. There are two things the Overman must know in order to take power, his own vision for society, and how he plans to achieve that. There is no historical, scientific, or moral knowledge necessary for the Overman because he is fully aware of his own creative will. Even Nietzsche's writing itself is not necessary to the overman. Nietzsche does not claim to be the Overman but rather the herald of the Overman who is to come. Nietzsche seeks through his writing to encourage and create a person or group of persons who are greater than him, and who have the power to actually bring

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<sup>103</sup> Nietzsche, *"Twilight of the Idols"*

<sup>104</sup> Dannhauser., 841-842

<sup>105</sup> Nietzsche, *"Twilight of the Idols"*

about the rule of the Overman.<sup>106</sup> The purpose of Nietzschean education is to promote the philosophy of the Overman, but not to tell the Overman what to do with his power. The Overman is to know himself above and instead of all other things. History, philosophy, logic, mathematics, and science do not matter in a Nietzschean education because the goal of Nietzschean rule is purely self-determined.<sup>107</sup>

Nietzsche wrote and published his philosophy so it would be widely read, but he was aware that it would not be widely understood. In the preface to *The Antichrist* Nietzsche describes the kind of person who is meant to read and understand his work. He describes these readers as indifferent, having the strength for the hard questions, having the courage for the forbidden, and possessing a new conscience for new truths.<sup>108</sup> He says that such men alone are his right readers.<sup>109</sup> This clearly indicates that Nietzsche, while making his writing widely accessible, only believed that true education could be gained by those who are born superior. This is due to the fact that Nietzsche calls for the destruction of all previous knowledge and education so as to make room for his philosophy and the creative will of the overman.<sup>110</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche describes the kind of people who are unable to understand him. He calls them the last man and regards them as the most contemptible of all humanity. He writes “They have something of which they are proud. What do they call that which makes them proud? Education they call it; it distinguishes them from the goatherds.”<sup>111</sup> Here Nietzsche’s disdain for traditional education is made clear. For Nietzsche, the kind of education a ruler must have can

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<sup>106</sup> Nietzsche, “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.”

<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche, “*Twilight of the Idols*”

<sup>108</sup> Nietzsche, 569.

<sup>109</sup> IBID

<sup>110</sup> IBID

<sup>111</sup> Nietzsche, 128.

only be gained through the rejection and destruction of all other kinds of education in favor of the understanding of and ability to act upon his philosophy.

Nietzschean education does not concern what the Overman must learn but what must be rejected in order to take power. A Nietzschean education would begin with the reading and right understanding of his philosophic writing. This understanding would not have to be taught to the Overman, because Nietzsche wrote in such a way that only the Overman could fully understand it in the first place. Ideally, after the reading of his work, Nietzsche would expect the Overman to take action. The specifics of this action are intentionally vague and are entirely up to the discretion of the Overman. But at the completion of a Nietzschean education the Overman will have let go of all morality and ends that do not both begin and end within himself.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes “Only the yoke for the thousand necks is still lacking: the one goal is lacking. Humanity still has no goal. But tell me, my brothers, if humanity still lacks a goal- is humanity itself not still lacking too?”<sup>112</sup> This quote may seem to contradict the overall lack of telos in Nietzsche’s philosophy. This is because Nietzsche grapples with the destruction of God and the consequences thereof. He is aware that mankind by nature seeks a cause, and yet finds no cause worth seeking. Except of course, the cause of the Overman who is in itself a god of Nietzsche’s own design. In the next passage of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he writes, “Let the future and the farthest be for you the cause of your today: in your friend you shall love the Overman as your cause.”<sup>113</sup> In a Nietzschean education one learns nothing but the Overman and the ways of the Overman, for the point of that education is the Overman himself.

The purpose of education for a Machiavellian prince is to prepare the leader to make decisions which lead to success. Machiavelli’s definition of success does not necessarily mean

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<sup>112</sup> IBID., 172

<sup>113</sup> Nietzsche, “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*”

winning but doing what is in the long-term best interest of the prince and his people. An example of this is in Machiavelli's teaching about neutrality in war. He writes in *The Prince* that if two nearby nations are at war, the prince should side with one or the other.<sup>114</sup> The idea here being that win or lose, an alliance is made. Whereas if a ruler remains neutral, they are inevitably distained by both parties. In this case, even if the prince loses in the short term, they have made a decision that is in his best interest long-term. This definition of success means that the prince should not make decisions that are beneficial in the short term if they are detrimental in the long term. A prince, therefore, should never be indebted to anyone. Machiavellian success also has to do with maintaining power and political stability.

Machiavelli writes that the virtues of the people, such as education, invention, science, and art should be celebrated.<sup>115</sup> *The Prince* is to create political stability, which is in the best interest of both the people and himself. This political stability may allow the people to pursue education, but it is a positive side effect rather than a specific goal. This is the part of Machiavelli's teaching which concerns meritocracy is meant to permeate all of society. This is the idea that people should have to earn their way, and should not be given jobs, honors, or power without first proving that they can handle it well. Beyond this, however, is the teaching that is meant for the prince. The rest of Machiavellian philosophy is not meant to be kept secret or hidden from the people, but those who do not wish to gain political power have no practical reason to study it. Thus, Machiavelli does not discourage education among the many, but he does require a particular education for the prince. The prince must be educated differently from the masses because the prince has a specific role and a specific set of morals with which to rule.

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<sup>114</sup> Machiavelli, 58.

<sup>115</sup> Machiavelli, "*The Prince*"



Thus, the education of the prince will be fundamentally different and far more important than the education of the masses.

A Machiavellian Prince should be well versed in history, politics, and geography, Furthermore, he must understand the difference between the virtue that is encouraged amongst the people and the virtue he should follow himself. There is an effectual truth that the prince must manufacture, so as to keep the people in line while also maintaining the kind of morality he needs to rule successfully.<sup>116</sup> A Machiavellian prince is largely self-educated, and it is up to him to know what he needs to in order to make decisions which have the best consequences.

It is important for a Machiavellian prince to be educated in the history of politics and war, so that he may learn from the successes and failures of those who came before him. Throughout Machiavelli's writings he uses historical examples of leaders such as Caesar Borgia to explain how a ruler should respond to certain situations.<sup>117</sup> This allows the leader, without making mistakes himself, to evaluate what action is in the long-term interest of himself and the people. This stems from Machiavelli's belief that man can and should control as much fortune as he can. This historical hindsight, which provides necessary foresight, is one important way for a ruler to control fortune in any given political situation.

It is important for a Machiavellian ruler to understand virtue, both traditional and Machiavellian virtue. Traditional virtue is the ethical philosophy that was put forth by Aristotelian philosophy and medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. This basis of classical virtue is a combination of Christian morality and ancient philosophy. One major tenet of traditional virtue is that true virtue lies in the middle of two extremes. The prince must appear before the people to possess traditional virtue, so that the people will continue to practice

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<sup>116</sup> Machiavelli, "*The Prince*"

<sup>117</sup> IBID

traditional virtue in their own lives. Machiavelli recognizes the need for virtue and morality in society because those things tie society together. However, the ruler has a separate set of virtues with which he must rule.

Machiavellian virtue lies in the prince doing what is in the best interests of himself and the people, no matter what conventional morality says about the action. Machiavelli's teaching on virtue is very deliberate in the way that it destroys the classical view. Machiavelli both turns the trifold thought process into a twofold process, eliminating the virtuous middle and reducing every situation to extremes. For example, the advice could be given that one should not overtax the people in order to spoil the nobles without flipping the classical view of liberality on its head. Machiavelli says that liberality is bad and encourages what is classically considered the vice of stinginess. He later says that it will be realized that in his stinginess he is being generous to the people when in reality he is allowing everyone to keep what is theirs.<sup>118</sup> It is important for a Machiavellian ruler to have no qualms about doing what is necessary, but also to understand how his actions will make him appear. There must always be the façade, or the effectual truth of virtue that is believed by the masses.

The goal of Christian education is to be able to know and have a relationship with God. The relationship between a Christian ruler and God is important because this relationship makes the ruler accountable to something above himself. It is through this relationship that the ethics, prudence, and virtue of a Christian ruler are produced. This educational goal starkly contrasts with Nietzschean and Machiavellian goals. This opens education to everyone and places a moral obligation on the ruler to provide that in some form or fashion. In addition to this educational basis, Christian people are also called into different vocations, careers, and levels of power.

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<sup>118</sup> Machiavelli, 34.

Those who are called into specific things must then gain the education required to perform that job. A Christian ruler must then gain the education that they need to be a good political leader. This not only includes an understanding of Christian philosophy and ethic, but also practical things such as history, war, economics, and details about the way their government works.

A Christian thinker allows and encourages education for everyone, because all people should at least be able to understand Biblical teaching. It is made clear by Christian thinkers that all believers are given different gifts and are called to different things.<sup>119</sup> Different callings require various types and levels of education. Therefore, while a certain level of education is encouraged for all people, there is also specialized education for certain vocations. If one is called into ministry, they go to seminary or if they are called to be a plumber, they must get the proper certification. The calling to lead is no different, and there are specific things that a Christian ruler should be educated in so that they know how to exercise prudence.

All people should be taught to read, write, and think for themselves. These are all disciplines that help foster a loving relationship with God. Beyond these simple disciplines, a Christian ruler must also be educated in ethics and history. When Erasmus wrote *The Education of a Christian Prince* he wrote in the context of monarchy. He makes the point that the making of a good ruler is not in noble birth, but in the education of that ruler. Erasmus writes that a leader should first and foremost be educated in morality, and then in history, warcraft, and the relationship the ruler should have to the people.<sup>120</sup>

In *The Education of a Christian Prince* Erasmus writes, “The seeds of morality must be sewn in the virgin soil of his infant heart”.<sup>121</sup> This serves several imperative purposes. First, a

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<sup>119</sup> Erasmus, “*The Education of a Christian Prince*”

<sup>120</sup> IBID

<sup>121</sup> IBID., 5.

Christian ruler does not gain the obedience of the people through fear but must earn their obedience through the demonstration of integrity and competence. Then it must be taken into account that the political leader, whether people like to admit it or not, are also moral leaders. Erasmus writes, “Turn the pages of history and you will always find the morality of an age reflecting the life of its prince”.<sup>122</sup> It is historically true that the morality of a ruler will seep into the hearts and minds of the people who admire them. This is what a Machiavellian leader hopes to achieve in faking traditional virtue. The issue being that the people can recognize legitimate virtue from that which is a façade. Finally, it is the virtue and ethic of a Christian leader which keeps him from becoming a tyrant.

Much like Machiavelli, Erasmus writes that a ruler must be educated in practical things such as history and warcraft. Erasmus notes that a ruler must be able to look back at tyrants such as Nero and Caligula to see what a Christian prince should not be. It is also true that a ruler should look back at other statesmen throughout history as examples of how to respond and exercise prudence in specific situations.<sup>123</sup> Erasmus teaches that the prince should be well educated in established principles so that he might gain wisdom through theory rather than by trial and error. Because the consequences of his mistakes affect everyone, trial and error is a dangerous thing in a ruler. It logically follows that a ruler should have a working knowledge of economics, war, and the way their specific government works. While the philosophers discussed herein do not specifically mention having an understanding of political workings, this is largely because they wrote in a time when monarchy was the only popular form of government. With the increasing popularity of democracy and constitutional monarchy it is now important for a ruler to

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<sup>122</sup> IBID., 21.

<sup>123</sup> IBID

understand the complex inner workings of their government, and to understand the rights of the people within that.

It is important for Christian rulers to understand the basic rights that inherently belong to all people, so that they can protect those rights. In *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker writes that there is a law which is ordained by God, that cannot be created but only discovered by man.<sup>124</sup> Hooker further asserts that this divine law, which is set forth by God and discovered by man, bind mankind absolutely whether or not there be any formal fellowship or agreement. This law, being available to all mankind, is a virtue which all mankind has a duty to discover. Hooker states that as human beings we have certain duties to God and to one another, and it logically follows that from these duties the rights necessary to pursue them must arise. It must be noted herein that when given the liberty to pursue these things, not all men will use it wisely. Nonetheless it is imperative that all men are given the liberty to perform their duty to God and man, *pro deo et humanitate*, and they may then do what they will with that freedom.

Hooker writes that mankind has the gift of reason and thus all bear the duty of pursuing truth and discovering the natural law. In order to achieve this, people must have the right to think and to speak freely. For if there is no free thought and no free speech, man is robbed of his ability to pursue truth. Similarly, Hooker writes that happiness is found in the full enjoyment of God.<sup>125</sup> As this is clearly a good in itself, man must have the right of religious freedom, and the right to pursue happiness. This teaching can be logically expanded to say that within any duty mankind has to one another and to God, and in the pursuit of those things which are truly good, there must be a natural right to that pursuit. This liberty, or free will, is granted by God in the hope that man will use it well, and the knowledge that it may not be. Similarly, a Christian ruler

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<sup>124</sup> Hooker, 82.

<sup>125</sup> Hooker, 101.

will protect the natural rights of their people and will do so with the knowledge that man is fundamentally flawed and may use that liberty for ill purpose.

At the cumulation of this education in ethics, law, and practical disciplines a Christian leader should have gained the ability to exercise prudence. Prudence being the ability to deliberate well and apply general principles to specific situations. Aquinas writes that prudence is “right reasoning about things to be done.”<sup>126</sup> While prudence is an intellectual virtue, it makes reason rightly disposed with regard to moral matters. Meaning that a Christian ruler will not simply deliberate what is the simplest solution to an issue, but what solution can be both practically and morally upright. Prudence is a useful quality in all people, no matter their vocation. However, it is a necessary quality in political leaders because much of their duty lies in the ability to make quick decisions with widespread and serious consequences. A Christian ruler, at the end of their proper education, will have both a practical and moral understanding of the intricacies of political rule.

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "Treatise on the Virtues," tr. John A. Oesterle. (University of Notre Dame, 1984), 84-85.

## Conclusion

Nietzschean views on the purpose of political power, war, and education all result in the oppression of the people. Nietzschean thought is founded upon a contempt for mankind, its traditions, and values. Thus, Nietzsche puts no moral obligation on the overman to take care of the people over which he is to rule. He also does not see that there is any intrinsic value in human life, and he places no boundaries on cruelty. Nietzsche's philosophy is meant to speak to a select few and proceeds to give license of tyranny to those who can comprehend his teaching. The ultimate end of Nietzschean rule is the destruction of values and the construction of an enigmatic world order which is not detailed, but is supposed to be inarguably better than what now exists.

Machiavelli's views on the purpose of political power, war, and education has mixed effects on the people under the rule of the prince. The purpose of rule for Machiavelli is to create political stability, which is in itself a good. Machiavelli calls for the celebration of innovation amongst the people, so they are clearly free to pursue their interest. However, Machiavelli's lack of moral requirements of the prince and the teaching about cruelty well used, while logical in theory, do not work in practice. Machiavelli fails to address, or rather rejects the very idea of human nature. However, human nature dictates that a Machiavellian ruler is bound to become corrupt. Machiavellian philosophy requires a constant denial of personal desire in the pursuit of success and self-interest. Human beings are incapable of carrying out Machiavelli's instruction to the letter, and thus the perfect Machiavellian prince cannot exist.

The Christian philosophy of rule concerning the purpose of political power, war, and education encourages more noble and prudent leadership than Nietzsche and Machiavelli. Through the philosophies of Aquinas, Erasmus, and Hooker it is made clear that the purpose of

Christian leadership is to pursue the common good. This differs from Machiavelli's teaching in that the prince pursues his personal interest and the common interest is supposed to follow.

Whereas a Christian thinker states that the ruler is to pursue the common good above their own personal desires and interest. The Christian ruler is also called to exercise great prudence in war and is aware and respectful of the intrinsic value of human life. Furthermore, Christian rulers are called to provide and encourage education amongst the people. A Christian ruler is bound by Christian morality and virtue, and thus is more likely to resist the temptation to corruption and cruelty. A Christian leader is aware of the imperfectability of man, and safeguards against the illusion of perfectible government. The secret to a good, just, moral, and effective rule is to be aware that man is imperfect and to instead strive for what is best within us. This understanding breeds much needed humility in Christian leaders. This humility makes Christian rulers aware that they cannot control everything and that there is a reality above and beyond themselves. These qualities create a leader that, though imperfect, will strive to do what is best for their people, and will possess the prudence necessary to achieve those ends.



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