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The Prince's Argumentative Credibility

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Background: Niccolò Machiavelli declares his intention in *The Prince* to delve into “a discussion of how things are in real life and not waste time with a discussion of an imaginary world,” and so to give a realistic account of politics and governance. He does this through the study of historical leaders, establishing a discourse on the best attributes of a successful ruler often based on their failures and accomplishments. A key attribute, for Machiavelli, is a ruler’s ability to garner respect and fear from their people, whilst avoiding any hate. Inadvertently, he seems to advocate for treading a fine line between fear and hatred.

Objectives: To what extent is Machiavelli’s advise for rulers to be feared but not hated consistent and applicable? This question is crucial, because a ruler’s main purpose in Machiavelli’s view should be to maintain their rule at all costs. Hatred by the people is a cause for instability and will result in the demise of the ruler, while fear creates stability. If hatred cannot be clearly defined and therefore avoided, then this points to a serious flaw in Machiavelli’s system.

Methods: Comparative method, close textual analysis, and logical investigation.

Results: I claim that Machiavelli’s theory about the reasons generating hatred of the ruled against their rulers is problematic. I will show logical fallacies and inconsistencies in this theory by investigating various claims he makes about hatred as well as comparing them to the examples he uses to support these claims. Further, I discuss attempts to explain these inconsistencies.



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Conclusions I come to the conclusion that The Prince's flows make the ruler outlined in the book an idealistic figure. This contradicts, indeed, Machiavelli's stated intention to write a realistic account of politics.

Keywords: Logical fallacy, inconsistency, hate, fear, rule, credibility.

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