Machiavellian principle “It is better to be feared than to be loved” will not survive in a vacuum

Factoring out powers love may poses or how beneficial its cultivation may be, the truth of this statement depends on the effectiveness of fear. Statement such as “Nothing says ‘Obey Me’ like a bloody head on a fence post!” is a clear and conscience directive in the same style as Machiavelli’s writing. But it lacks profundity not just because it is attributed to Stewie, from Family Guy but because it is not part of a greater context. In another words what Machiavelli concocted as a whole is far superior to the sum of commonplace ingredients he used. Modern Machiavellian rhetoric, political or otherwise, suffer from oversimplification dictated by our sound bite culture, and should not discount Machiavelli’s depth of insight. As a product of his own time, and also because he was prescribing the actions of a prince, Machiavelli could take for granted certain principals; chief among them, is my assertion, the reader would not take one recommendation and run with it. What he submitted is a quiver of techniques, and wise is one that grabs it rather than a single arrow.

Machiavelli was not a simple man and his book “The Prince”, though simply written, was not meant for simple people or situations. The inclination, at first glance, to apply it to daily life is probably shortsighted; an idea propelled by made for mass market philosophy heaped on bargain shelves of the self-help section brandishing whimsical covers that promise enlightenment in twelve steps or claim a seven day plan for a happier YOU! The genius of his work is that he did not suggest a single tact as supreme; it is evident that he was conscious of variables and employed a graceful breakdown model when he wrote: “One would like to be both -feared and loved- but as it is difficult to combine love and fear, if one HAS to choose between them it is far safer to be feared than loved.”.

On the surface mobsters, gangsters and brutes drive their power from the fear that they induce in general public. The big leader treats his subordinates with as much brutality as possible, and the rank and file extort mercilessly. Love and respect for one another or humanity is never part of the equation. Trying to control the chaos it is reasonable when societies attempt to exert the supreme power and endow the law enforcement branch with capital punishment. This shallow observation and tenuous remedy fails to consider many nuances: innate brutality of mankind, survival instinct, simplemindedness, wanting to belong and self-righteousness just to name a few. In thinking about brutality and criminality as social problems, digression from the subject at hand is not my aim. I am only suggesting that in an environment where brut power buys fear of subordinates assuming that law enforcement equipped with capital punishment will win the fight is not a safe bet. Law enforcement is a job but criminality is either a disease or a chosen lifestyle. Law enforcement is obliged to be transparent but criminality is not. Law enforcement has little if any tangible reward for the enforcer risking his/her life but criminality offers far greater a reward for the same risk. Criminals probably fear reprisal from other criminals a lot more than they ever fear the police. Though politicians are quick to take credit for it when crime statistics ebb, those who are smart enough to survive in the criminal world for a while and are not burdened by a mental disease probably reduce their criminal activity because they can afford it or are older and tired of looking over their shoulder.

“What if we apply more than just one of Machiavelli’s suggestions to our problem? “ asks the Prince, the President, the Prime Minister, the Mayor, the average citizen. What if we allow the police to be: secretive and swift, autonomies and unshackled from policies and procedures, directly rewarded for its actin? What if we accept the risk that a strong police may soon eliminate the criminals and instead of retiring turn our society into a police state and subjugate us? What if we the people accept the mistaken death of an honest person as an unfortunate and inescapable reality? Can we allow our collective fear of taking an innocent life ever dime in comparison to a criminal’s fear of getting caught?

Atomic bombardment that concluded the World War II caused an unfathomable fear of being eliminated. Such devastating power had never been utilized in war before, so it produced a result that Machiavelli predicted. This is probably not repeatable again. The powerful idea is made impotent with international treaties and feeble against an enemy far primitive compared to the Japanizes Imperial army but nimble, conniving, dispersed, and ruthless. The quagmire of Vietnam, Korea, Iraq and Afghanistan does not reflect lack of American military might. The poorly fed barefoot Taliban fighter is in no way superior to a US soldier; but far more ruthless then average American public can handle. Taliban commits televised beheading while America contemplates hotel Guantanamo. America is not afraid of Taliban. America and the western world is afraid of losing the culture and values it has come to adopted and hold dear.

American industry, American military, American espionage, American politics, American economy, American ideology when made united and pointed against a fixed target won the cold war very decidedly. American soldier did not face and defeat the red army. The American way that provided for individual liberty, free enterprise, limitless profit and uncharted growth potential provided such an imbalance that caused the opposing ideology to crumble.

Fear does not have to be fear of life or limb and challengers do not have to governments and nations. Love of a long standing academic institution, love of innocent souls entrusted to the hands of adults for upbringing and education or love of decency and humanity was not enough to force the administrators of Penn State university put a stop to years of physical and emotional abuse. A CBS Pittsburg article from July 13, 2012 citing the FBI chief investigator writes: “The bottom line for the investigation, Freeh says that publicity – the fear of bad publicity – was what motivated the administrators”.

If fear as a motivator seams confusing love is elusive. Lynching of African slaves was committed by a very committed, idealistic, connected, powerful and established segment of American populous against a minority that was utterly powerless, totally unarmed, iconically unable to hide, and lacking in every way. Fighting against slavery had immediate bitter consequences while fighting to keep it had immediate financial rewards. But love of freedom, love of self and belief in intangible ideals motivated people to struggle. The struggle was foolish and unattainable at first but it was destined to succeed. The struggling slave had to desire freedom more than the oppressor was willing to spend to keep the slave in bondage. One more perilous scape at night through the swamp, one more lashing in the square, one more spit in the face, one more insult, one more day, one more breath and the tyrant had to relent or lose his soul. Unlike the Native Americans, slaves provided free labor so their eradication was not viable. But slavery as an economical tool demanded a price that the white public as a whole was not willing to pay. Using slave labor is not cheap for the white man if he has to discard his humanity.

The terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 were another attempt at fear that was ill conserved. If bombing of Hiroshima showed the American military supremacy, bombing of Nagasaki, three days later, proved its relentlessness. Conspirators of September 11th tried to do as much damage as possible in one day because they knew that there will be no second chance. It is hard to imagine how far the planning or lack thereof went. The unsuccessful scenario is easy to imagine: you kill yourself and perhaps a large number of civilians, unite the world against your ideals and condemn your followers to a life on the run. But was supposed to be the successful scenario? Set fire to pentagon, demolish the twin towers, overcome the resistance of passengers of flight 93 and maybe set the White House on fire and then what? The US president trembling and defeated is supposed to pick up the phone and call who to surrender? The American public angry at their government is supposed to abandon it and pay homage to whom?

Even God or those who presume to speak on behalf of God were never able to use one idea singularly and successfully. Not considering the divine power in forming the word of God through the ages, it is conceivable that proponents of religions had all the motivation to formulate these edicts in the most calculated manner, and they certainly had enough time and chances. Yet God is portrayed as a schizophrenic that never knows quit how or how much to love or punish us mere mortals. We are simultaneously made to fear the almighty smiter and lured to the open arms of the companionate and the merciful.

Just as a fear mongering Hitler in history is opposed by a peacefully effective Martin Luther King an appeasing shallow political correctness is cured by discipline and tough love. The concepts and ideas that Machiavelli pointed out can individually be plain and conflicting, but put together form the content of this boiling and tumultuous cauldron we call life. If the simplicity and directness of his writing point out the black and white islands of truth in our lives then he must have assumed us smart enough to unavoidably notice the ocean of gray in between where we spend most of time.