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*I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System.*

Turning Perspective on its Head

I have been surrounded by politics my entire life. My parents have always been somewhat politically active, looking into candidates and making informed choices before going out to cast their ballots. As a young child I overheard their conversations many times, and tried to listen closely. My opinions have been formed over the years by those conversations, though I try to go into each new political situation with a clear head and no prior bias. In all of that time, however, I mainly thought of politics as a means for swaying things in a way that best benefits you and the people you care about; people tend to vote for the candidates they believe will represent them best, lower their taxes, and pass legislation that is beneficial to them. Having grown up under that mindset, I never really thought of governance from the perspective of the governor. I hadn’t considered the immense responsibility and pressure involved with being in any official government position. Machiavelli’s *The Prince* made me reflect on what it meant to be a leader, and what it meant to take full responsibility for the wellbeing of your people.

While *The Prince* is specifically directed at Autocracies, I believe many of its points on strong, firm leadership can be applied to any person in a position of power under some government. In the US government, one could consider *The Prince* to be most directly applicable to the President; the President makes some of the hardest decisions and is held most directly responsible for the state of the nation. As a young, impressionable child, I believed that the President was capable of doing whatever he wanted or needed to do, so naturally the people who won the vote would always be the happiest while that President was in office. Later I learned how our government really works, and learned that, through arguments, disagreements, and eventual compromises, our government tries to compensate for everyone’s wants and needs, and does not simply benefit the “winner” of a single election.

Reflecting on my changing thoughts on governance, *The Prince,* in some sense, actually goes closer with my younger self’s opinion of government: *The Prince* believes that an authoritative figure should have the absolute power to enact any rule they believe will benefit their nation at large, without having to compromise or justify their actions to others. One could argue that an authoritative figure creating laws against the will of his people will generate hatred from his constituency, but Machiavelli responds to this by writing “From this arises an argument: whether it is better to be loved than to be feared, or the contrary. I reply that one should like to be both one and the other; but since it is difficult to join them together, it is much safer to be feared than to be loved when one of the two must be lacking” (Jacobus 227). Machiavelli goes on to argue that being feared is far more beneficial because love can be lost at a moment’s notice, whereas the obedience created by fear is much longer lasting. These sorts of hard questions never even crossed my younger mind, and even in our republican government any official reaches a point where they must decide between making the people happy or getting something they believe is important done.

My view on governance has changed many times over my small number of years. What started as a vague concept became a more understandable, if still complex, topic of conversation. While I know politics is a heated topic and makes for awful casual conversation, I do enjoy talking about the intricacies of our government. I’ve been told I’m crazy, but I actually look forward to the first time I get called for Jury Duty; I look forward to seeing how our legal system works from the inside out. In the same vein, reading various works on the topic of governance, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* in particular, have helped me understand, or at least made me ponder, some of the more detailed intricacies of governments across the world. I don’t know whether I agree or disagree with the points brought up in *The Prince*, but I am thankful that it gave me the means and the opportunity to further ponder my stance on the topic.