

system of political practices is most likely to satisfy the most people?

This question can be phrased in another way. How are the best practices to be arrived at? Machiavelli does not offer the answer to this question because that is not the purpose of system theory. He offers a cybernetic method by which these answers are most likely to be found. Compare his proposition to that of the biologist Charles Darwin. Darwin says that the reason inferior specimens do not propagate and eventually destroy their species is because they are *systematically* eliminated by the process of natural selection. Individuals found wanting by the jury of natural laws are eliminated from the gene pool by untimely demise. Natural selection is nature's cybernetic solution to the problem of insuring the healthy development of species.

Consider next Adam Smith's solution to the problem of productivity. Under the capitalist system, effectiveness is measured by profits. A business is judged against its competitors as well as the rest of society, with ineffective practices resulting in bankruptcy. Thus, capitalism is an economic regulator, amplifying productive practices and attenuating inefficient ones--automatically.

Now we can consider Machiavelli's solution to the political problem in a similar vein. His answer is pluralism. In a sense, this is not any different from natural selection or capitalism. The fundamental principals are the same--take advantage of the intervention of natural laws to eliminate irrational behavior. This process is most apparent in biology, because most organisms are not far removed from nature. Positive attributes are quickly rewarded and human intervention is negligible. Further removed from nature is economics. Human intervention here is much more noticeable, often impairing the functioning of the free market apparatus. However, there are still some hard and fast absolutes--a society unable to feed itself falls subject to one with a more effective economic system, or simply disintegrates. We see now that politics is the most complex problem of the three, because it is almost exclusively a study of human intervention. It is likely that different forms of government vary greatly in their effectiveness, but we have no simple standard for comparison. Political satisfaction is a vector that varies with the individual and is a function of time. In the world of politics there is no bottom line. Nevertheless, political systems are still subject to natural law. One that fails to adequately deal with civil discontent and physical necessity is unlikely to survive.

With these considerations in mind, it is natural that Machiavelli proposes his form of pluralism as the best solution when working under uncertainty. Political interactions are information-poor. Multiple factions represents the best way of insuring an unbiased flow of

information to decision makers. This rule follows directly from the calculus of politics. It is the analogue to the perfect competition case in capitalism. True, it may be difficult under any circumstances for man to choose the correct political course of action. However, pluralism constitutes a decision process rich in feedback, constantly adjusting to changing conditions. Its strength is derived from its flexibility to choose from a mixture of ideas. In an imperfect world, surely it is the least objectionable.

Thus, Machiavelli holds that it is friction between differing factions that guarantees the health of the state. Specifically,

"...in every republic there are two different inclinations; that of the people and that of the upper class, and that all the laws which are made in favor of liberty are born of the conflict between the two." (*Discourses*, 183)

He then seeks to establish a set of constraints which will best channel these conflicts in order to insure the public welfare. Here he is forced to make some assumptions concerning the sort of behavior likely to be encountered in response to his policies. He says:

"...it is necessary for anyone who organizes a republic and institutes laws to take for granted that all men are evil and that they will always express the wickedness of their spirit whenever they have the opportunity." (*Ibid.*, 181)

To many, this might appear to be a pessimistic view of the world, unwarranted given the fact that the majority of people we interact with are not noticeably "wicked." However, in this assumption, Machiavelli once more demonstrates his intuitive grasp of probabilistic system behavior. Given a system which assumes virtue, any singular evil action is likely to propagate, corrupting the entire system. Disincentives quickly develop to discourage the virtuous, and the just individual is perversely punished for not exploiting his fellow man. Thus, in this case assuming one state is likely to produce the exact opposite. If we instead assume evil behavior, then the society is able to monitor and check exploitation, punishing the occasional evil individual and preventing a breakdown of social morality. Thus, in assuming evil nature, Machiavelli was not choosing the most pessimistic condition so much as the most robust condition.

Machiavelli's world is one of constant change. Few processes lead to ideal harmony and moderation.

"When the Roman people had recovered their liberty and had returned to their former level of power...it seemed reasonable to assume that Rome would be quiet for a time, nevertheless, experience shows the contrary, for every day new riots and disputes arose. And since Livy very