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Chapter One: Political Theory and System Theory

1.0 Early Political Philosophers

Machiavelli's writings offer a model of political interaction particularly amenable to description using the system dynamics methodology. In order to understand why, it is useful to consider his ideas with respect to earlier political theorists.

Plato has been called by many the first political philosopher. In The Republic, he presents his ideal political system. This system springs from Plato's conception of justice. "Justice," he says, "is having and doing what is one's own." A just society is one in perfect harmony with itself, where each man does what he is best suited for. For Plato, this entails a society of strata, with each class performing a function for the benefit of all. The worldly till the soil, the brave protect the city, and the wise rule over all. Matters of politics are far too important to be left to the masses, and the ruling class is selected by educational election.

This conception of the ideal society is interesting for two reasons. One is its dependence on virtue to maintain itself. At its pinnacle is the philosopher-king, the "perfect man." The philosopher-king can be expected to rule ably because he has the training to comprehend the ideal "forms" of which truth consists. Under the leadership of the philosopher-king and the influence of these "forms", the ideal political system exists in perfect harmony. Without men of virtue, however, this ideal state can neither be attained nor maintained.

The second item of interest concerning Plato's philosophy is a product of the first--the existence of the ideal state in harmony. In the words of Wili Durant (1933, 38)

"What Plato lacks above all, perhaps, is the Heracleitan sense of flux and change; he is too anxious to have the moving picture of this world become a fixed and still tableau. He loves order exclusively, like any timid philosopher; he has been frightened by the democratic turbulence of Athens into an extreme neglect of individual values; he arranges men in classes like an