

Essay Assignment #2—Conceptual Analysis in Machiavelli's *The Prince*

Introduction

In this essay, you will engage in a new form of analysis: philosophical analysis. The object of this analysis, the questions one asks, the evidence one selects, and some of the formal features of the genre are distinct from the literary analysis that you conducted in your essay on *The Iliad*. Philosophy concerns itself with various branches of study: one focused on the nature of reality (metaphysics), and others on the study of knowledge (epistemology), logic, morality, aesthetics, and politics. Though there is no consensus about what constitutes philosophy as a whole, most philosophers would agree that their work routinely includes *conceptual analysis*, one of the tools philosophers use when evaluating arguments. When practicing conceptual analysis, a philosopher takes some notion and distinguishes its essential parts, as Aristotle does when he analyzes the concept “human being” into the component parts “rational” and “animal.” Additionally, most philosophers agree that their work aims at concision and economy of language.

Not all of the texts assigned for this unit—*The Art of War*, *The Prince*, and *Just and Unjust Wars*—are canonical philosophical texts; but all employ conceptual analysis. That is, they propose definitions of concepts and then test those definitions against imagined or historical examples to help illustrate, complicate, and delimit those concepts. Machiavelli, for instance, examines the characteristics that are required of a political sovereign, such as virtue, prudence, and cruelty. Then, he offers examples of rulers throughout history who exemplify, or fail to exemplify, those characteristics, for the purpose of arriving at a more comprehensive definition of sovereignty.

Assignment

Your section leader will select a passage from Machiavelli's *The Prince* that uses examples to analyze a concept. Begin by articulating Machiavelli's proposed definition of the concept. Then, after carefully re-reading the passage, explain how his examples illustrate, supplement, refine, or complicate his initial definition.

Your philosophical approach to this material should involve an evaluation of Machiavelli's argument: its premises and conclusion, as well as the reasoning Machiavelli employs to arrive at his conclusion. While your rough draft must be between 5-6 pages, your final draft will be approximately 4 pages. This decrease in page length will require you to focus your revision on concision. Your final paper should include only your most persuasive evidence and succinct prose.

This paper will be worth 35% of your writing grade.

Links

[The Writing Process](#)
[Student Learning Goals](#)
[Essay Rubric](#)