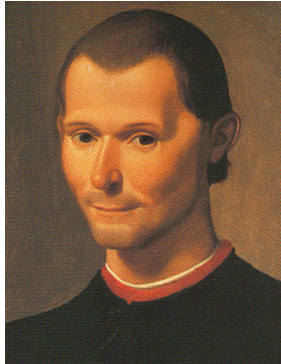


THE PRINCE

by Niccolò Machiavelli



THE AUTHOR

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) was born in Florence and received a good Renaissance education. He worked for seven years as a banker in Rome, then returned to Florence in 1494. He was thus witness to the fall of the Medici, the rise to power of Girolamo Savonarola, and the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France. In 1498, after the martyrdom of Savonarola, Machiavelli was given the office of Second Chancellor in the Florentine government. In this position, he traveled widely on diplomatic missions, one of which enabled him to spend a number of months in the court of Cesare Borgia, who became one of the chief models for his political masterwork. He also had contact with Cesare's father, Rodrigo Borgia, who had become Pope Alexander VI. After Alexander's death, Julius II, the "warrior pope" and an enemy of the Borgias, assumed the papal throne, and Cesare was exiled to Spain, where he died in 1506. Machiavelli helped to revive the Florentine militia, but was removed from office when the Medici family returned to power in 1512. After being briefly imprisoned and tortured, he decided to retire to the country and spend his time writing, though his real ambition was to return to political office. *The Prince*, written in 1514, was dedicated to the ruling Medici in the hopes that the advice found in the book, if useful, would spur them to return him to public life. This never occurred, however, and Machiavelli continued to write. In addition to political works like *The Art of War*, he also wrote two comic plays, *Mandragora* and *Clizia*. When the armies of Charles V sacked Rome in 1527, the Florentines again ejected the Medicis, but when Machiavelli tried to regain his office, he was rejected because he had spent so many years trying to curry the favor of the ruling family. He died a few months later. His reputation, for good or ill, is based largely on *The Prince*, which has been widely criticized as an immoral book while being widely put into practice by pragmatic politicians over the last five centuries.

SUMMARY

The book begins with a brief discussion of different kinds of states, after which the author indicates that it is his intention to deal with autocratic states rather than republics (his other writings show that he actually favored republics, but his purpose here was to provide advice for the budding autocrat). He addresses the differences between states that are inherited, those that are won by gift or conquest, and those composite states that result when land is added to an

existing entity. Each situation, according to Machiavelli, requires a different approach in order to sustain one's rule. He argues, for instance, that, in the case of new states, the prince should live in the region if at all possible, since that will make it easier for him to maintain order. People who are used to autocratic rule will easily adapt to it again under a new ruler, but those who are used to a republican form of government are difficult to convert.

Machiavelli then addresses matters involving how to treat one's friends and enemies, how to form and when to break alliances, and especially dwells on the importance of a strong military (he mistrusts mercenaries and troops borrowed from other rulers, and insists that the only sound army must consist of native troops).

The next major section of the book deals with the personal characteristics of the effective prince. While Machiavelli admires virtue and renounces vice as a matter of theory, he argues that vice is sometimes more useful than virtue in order to keep a prince in power. He discusses how, because popular favor is a very useful thing to have, the prince must appear to be a man of virtue, but notes that it is also important for him to know how to exercise what are generally considered vices when the situation calls for it. After spending a few pages dealing with matters like fortresses (to build or not to build?) and personal advisors (whom should you trust?), he concludes with a direct appeal to the Medici family, to whom the book is dedicated, to follow his advice and use it to unite Italy and restore its former glory.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Alexander Severus - Roman emperor from 222-235, Machiavelli used him as an example of a capable ruler who maintained his power by acting as both the fox and the lion, avoiding the contempt and hatred of his people.
- Alexander VI - Pope from 1492-1503, Rodrigo Borgia was personally immoral, but was a fine administrator with a well-developed political sensibility, and thus was admired by Machiavelli.
- Cesare Borgia - the illegitimate son of Alexander VI, he rose to power with his father's help, becoming, first a cardinal in the church, and later Duke of Romagna. Machiavelli, during his years as a Florentine diplomat, spent some time with him, and he became perhaps the chief exemplar of the principles enunciated in *The Prince*.
- Charles VIII - King of France from 1492-1498, he invaded Italy in 1494, leading to the expulsion of the Medici and the rise of Savonarola.
- Ferdinand of Aragon - King of Spain from 1474-1516, he conquered southern Italy by claiming the throne of Naples. Machiavelli said of him that he "never preaches anything but peace and good faith; and he is an enemy of both one and the other, and if he had either honoured either of them he would have lost either his standing or his state many times over."
- Hannibal - Commander of the armies of Carthage, he is used by Machiavelli as an example of one who can maintain power even if he is cruel because he has the allegiance of the army.

- Julius II - The “warrior pope,” he held the papal throne from 1503-1513. His military prowess was much admired by Machiavelli.
- Marcus Aurelius - Roman emperor from 161-180, he persecuted Christians, was known as a great Stoic philosopher, and is used by Machiavelli as an example of one who is able to maintain power because he enjoys the favor of the people.
- Maximinus Thrax - Roman emperor from 235-238, this vicious peasant seized the throne by assassination and was himself murdered by his own men. Machiavelli uses him as an example of a ruler who cannot maintain power without the support of his troops.
- Girolamo Savonarola - Headed a short-lived republic in Florence from 1494-1498, this Dominican friar attempted sweeping popular reforms under the guise of a divinely-inspired prophet, but was tortured and executed as a result of the actions of Alexander VI, whom he severely criticized.
- Francesco Sforza - Duke of Milan from 1450-1466 whose family remained in power for five generations, Machiavelli uses him as an example of one who created a stable state following a seizure of power.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“And here it has to be noted that men must be either pampered or crushed, because they can get revenge for small injuries but not for fatal ones.” (p.37-38)

“Men do you harm either because they fear you or because they hate you.” (p.61)

“Yet it cannot be called prowess [*virtu*] to kill fellow citizens, to betray friends, to be treacherous, pitiless, irreligious. These ways can win a prince power but not glory.” (p.63)

“Violence should be inflicted once for all; people will then forget what it tastes like and so be less resentful. Benefits should be conferred gradually; and in that way they will taste better.” (p.66)

“The main foundations of every state, new states as well as ancient or composite ones, are good laws and good arms; and because you cannot have good laws without good arms, and where there are good arms, good laws inevitably follow, I shall not discuss laws but give my attention to arms.” (p.77)

“A prince, therefore, should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler.” (p.87)

“The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need.” (p.91)

“And then, he must not flinch from being blamed for vices which are necessary for safeguarding the state. This is because, taking everything into account, he will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practises them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be wicked will bring him security and prosperity.” (p.92)

“From this arises the following question: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the reverse. The answer is that one would like to be both the one and the other; but because it is difficult to combine them, it is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both.” (p.96)

“The prince should nonetheless make himself feared in such a way that, if he is not loved, at least he escapes being hated.” (p.97)

“So it follows that a prudent ruler cannot, and should not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist. If all men were good, this precept would not be good; but because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them.” (p.99-100)

“A prince, therefore, need not necessarily have all the good qualities I mentioned above, but he should certainly appear to have them. I would even go so far as to say that if he has these qualities and always behaves accordingly he will find them ruinous; if he only appears to have them they will render him service. He should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, guileless, and devout. And indeed he should be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how.” (p.100)

“From this can be drawn another noteworthy consideration: that princes should delegate to others the enactment of unpopular measures and keep in their own hands the distribution of favours.” (p.106)

“A prince also wins prestige for being a true friend or a true enemy, that is, for revealing himself without any reservation in favour of one side against another. This policy is always more advantageous than neutrality.” (p.121)

“This is because the only way to safeguard yourself against flatterers is by letting people understand that you are not offended by the truth; but if everyone can speak the truth to you then you lose respect.” (p.126)

“I conclude, therefore, that as fortune is changeable whereas men are obstinate in their ways, men prosper so long as fortune and policy are in accord, and when there is a clash they fail. I hold strongly to this: that it is better to be impetuous than circumspect; because fortune is a woman and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her. Experience shows that she is more often subdued by men who do this than by those who act coldly. Always, being a woman, she favours young men, because they are less circumspect and more ardent, and because they command her with greater audacity.” (p.133)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author devotes most of his time to advising the prospective prince about the best ways to keep himself in power. He says little about the welfare of the people, but seems to assume that what is good for the prince is also good for his people. Is this true? Will those actions that are designed to keep the prince in power also be for the good of his subjects? Why does Machiavelli think so? Evaluate this idea, both from the book and from Scripture.
2. Niccolo Machiavelli, the author of *The Prince*, is clearly a pragmatist - he believes that the end justifies the means. Give specific illustrations from the book to support this assessment of the author's position, and evaluate his approach to civic life on the basis of the Bible.
3. Having read Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, choose one character from your summer reading who most exemplifies the adjective *Machiavellian*. Why do you think so? Use specifics from both books to connect the character with the principles set forth in Machiavelli's political handbook.
4. Discuss what Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* reveals about political life carried on in the absence of biblical principle. How do the practices advocated by Machiavelli and the consequences of engaging in those practices demonstrate the truth of biblical teachings about human nature?
5. Discuss the concept of human nature upon which Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* is based. Does he believe man to be essentially good or evil? How does his view of human nature influence the advice he gives to princes? Be specific.
6. When someone is called *Machiavellian*, it is not generally intended as a complement. Use specifics from Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* to explain why his name has earned such disrepute. Do you think he has been unjustly maligned? Why or why not?
7. In many cases, people who profess to be Christians are accused of hypocrisy because they fail to practice what they claim to believe. In the case of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, however, the situation tends to be the opposite - many who revile Machiavelli and his notorious book nonetheless employ his precepts in maintaining their power. Perhaps the worst of both worlds occurs when someone is a professing Christian while in fact practicing Machiavellian strategy in his realm. Give an example of such a person from your study of history. Show from your knowledge of his rule how he followed the principles contained in *The Prince*, and show from Scripture how these practices violated biblical teaching.

8. Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* was a groundbreaking book because its author refused to base his views of politics on any transcendent standard, whether religious or moral. He argued that no such standard could or should be consistently maintained by one who wished to remain in power. Instead, a successful prince should only be concerned with what works. Support this assertion with quotations from the book and critique it with the use of Scripture.
9. One central characteristic of the Renaissance man was that of *virtu*. This idea is also at the heart of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Using specific examples from Machiavelli's work, define *virtu* (translated *prowess* in the version we read) and discuss whether or not it is a good quality for a ruler to possess. Support your conclusion by citing appropriate biblical teachings.
10. One critic remarked that the *virtu* advocated by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince* was sadly lacking in *virtue*. Do you agree? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with evidence from the book and from the Bible.
11. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author states that "where there are good arms, good laws inevitably follow." Why did Machiavelli argue that a strong military was necessary for a stable society? Do you agree? Why or why not? Support or refute his position with details from the book.
12. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author states that "it is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both." Use biblical teaching on the qualities of a good king to evaluate the principle here enunciated by Machiavelli.
13. Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a manual of statecraft intended to advise prospective rulers about how best to do their jobs. Compare and contrast Machiavelli's concept of the ideal prince to the Bible's picture of the ideal king. How do they differ, and why?
14. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author argues that it is necessary for a prince to maintain the goodwill of his people in order to be successful. What are his reasons for making this assertion? Do you agree with his point? with his reasons for it? Why or why not?
15. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author contrasts "prowess" (*virtu*) and "fortune," by which he means personal competence and luck or chance. To what extent does Machiavelli's insistence that a good ruler to a large degree makes his own luck fit the overarching philosophy of the Italian Renaissance? Discuss in particular the relationship between Renaissance humanism and the religious foundations of Western society.
16. To what extent does Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* reflect the prevailing philosophy of the Italian Renaissance? Relate specific aspects of the book to what you have learned about the general characteristics of the era in which Machiavelli lived.

17. Discuss the comparison between fortune and a woman at the end of chapter 25 of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. What is the point of the comparison? What does it show about Machiavelli's understanding of the relationship between determinism and free will? What does it show about the prevailing view of women in Renaissance Italy?
18. In Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author argues that "a prudent ruler cannot, and should not, honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist. If all men were good, this precept would not be good; but because men are wretched creatures who would not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them." How does this precept conform to the general approach to moral issues in the book? Contrast Machiavelli's view of truthfulness to that found in Scripture. Be sure you plumb greater depths than merely saying that the Bible requires that we always tell the truth; discuss *why* this is the case.
19. In Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author refuses to give a transcendent justification, either moral or religious, for the advice he gives. Instead, he advocates his approach because it works, and supports his arguments with a multitude of examples from history. Is this the only way to undergird a pragmatic argument? Using what you have learned about logical argumentation, address the strengths and weakness of such an approach.
20. Perhaps no one has summarized Machiavellian philosophy more concisely than did Louis XIV of France when he said, "L'état, c'est moi" (I am the state). In Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author closely identifies the welfare of the prince with the welfare of the state. To what extent is it true that, as one goes, so goes the other? Support your arguments with details from the book and from your knowledge of history.
21. Suppose you were asked to write a modern version of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. What rulers from the twentieth century would you use to illustrate his principles? Be sure to match specific rulers to specific principles, and show how the two are connected.
22. Suppose you were asked to write a refutation of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. You know from your study of logic that inductive arguments fail in the face of a single counterexample. What examples would you give to refute Machiavelli's central ideas? Be sure to match specific rulers with specific principles, and show how the two are connected.
23. To what extent would Machiavelli have been an advocate of Utilitarianism? Use examples from Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* to show that he would have agreed or disagreed with the fact that everything should be done to produce "the greatest good for the greatest number."
24. As we have seen in Ethics, the Bible recognizes no such thing as a "necessary evil." Yet, in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the author argues that cruelty is sometimes a necessary evil on the part of a ruler. What is the difference between Machiavelli's approach to morality and that found in the Bible that would allow them to reach such different conclusions?

25. In Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he often outlines his arguments by dividing the subject into a few simple categories. Such oversimplification sometimes leads to the logical fallacy of the false dichotomy, whereby a speaker claims that there are two alternatives and argues that, if one is wrong, the other must be right, when in reality there are other alternatives he never mentions. Choose one example of such oversimplification in *The Prince* and show how it is in reality a false dichotomy, and thus an invalid argument.
26. Among the examples used by Niccolo Machiavelli in *The Prince* are a number from the Papal States, ruled by the pope at the time the book was written. With the exception of a few passing comments, he treats the princes of the church much like other princes in terms of what makes them successful or unsuccessful. From your knowledge of Church History, show how the truth of the examples used by Machiavelli explains the reaction against the papacy that drove the Protestant Reformation, which began during Machiavelli's lifetime.
27. The term "Renaissance Man" brings to mind a man like Leonardo da Vinci, a master of all branches of knowledge and fields of human endeavor. Using details from Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, discuss the extent to which the author's ideal prince was a Renaissance Man in the popular sense of the word.
28. The Renaissance was an era in which Western Europe experienced the rebirth of interest in the classical world of Greece and Rome. To what extent is this interest in the Classical Age evident in Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*? Are there any aspects of the classical world he explicitly repudiates?
29. In the media culture of the twenty-first century, people often bemoan the extent to which politics is controlled by image rather than substance. Candidates do all they can to make themselves look good and their opponents look bad. Using specifics from Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, discuss the extent to which Machiavelli would have approved of this situation. Does his advice still work today? Why or why not?
30. In the media culture of the twenty-first century, politicians often rely heavily on public opinion polls to shape their speeches and platforms. Using specifics from Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*, discuss the extent to which Machiavelli would have approved of this situation. Would he have advised his ideal prince to take a public opinion poll, or to pay attention to it if he did? Why or why not?
31. In Hamlet's most famous soliloquy, he speaks of "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Considering suicide, he seems overwhelmed by what fate has placed before him. How would Machiavelli have advised Hamlet? Use details from *The Prince* to form the suggestions he might have made to the downcast prince.
32. Discuss the general relevance of the principles found in Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Does his advice primarily fit the political circumstances of sixteenth-century Italy, or are they of general value in understanding political behavior? Support your argument with specifics from the book.

33. Discuss the tone of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. The author is known from other writings to have been a republican. Does the advice he gives in his famous manual for princes betray his republican principles, or is it instead written in an ironic tone intended to reveal the deep-seated flaws in any autocratic form of government? Is he giving serious advice, or is he mocking the princes of his day? Support your arguments with specifics from the book.
34. You have been reading Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* at home at the same time that we have been reading William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in class. Would you describe Macbeth as a Machiavellian? Would the author of *The Prince* have approved of the way Macbeth gained and sought to hold power? Why or why not?
35. Machiavelli lived in an era during which Nominalism was popular. How do the principles of Nominalist philosophy influence the approach the author takes in *The Prince*? How do these same principles anticipate the scientific approach to politics popularized in the late nineteenth century by men such as Napoleon III and Bismarck?
36. If you were running a school for princes and wanted to use Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* as a curriculum guide, what subjects would you teach, and how would you teach them? Support your arguments with specifics from the book.
37. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the idea of balance of power played an important part in European politics. According to this principle, a nation should ally with the weak against the strong, both in order to avoid universal domination by a single power, and also to put oneself into a position of influence and thus gain benefits from any coalition into which one entered. Discuss the principle of balance of power in the light of the teachings found in Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Would Machiavelli have supported or opposed this practice? Why? Be sure to use specifics from the book to support your conclusion.
38. Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) were written around the same time. Both deal with society as it ought to be in the minds of the respective authors, but their visions are very different ones. Compare and contrast the ideal societies pictured by the two men. What factors most readily explain the differences between the two volumes? Support your arguments with specifics from the two books.
39. To what extent is the Duke in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* a Machiavellian ruler? Compare and contrast his behavior to the precepts set forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Be specific.
40. To what extent is the King in William Shakespeare's *Henry V* a Machiavellian ruler? Compare and contrast his behavior to the precepts set forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Be specific.

41. To what extent is Bolingbroke in William Shakespeare's *Richard II* a Machiavellian ruler? Compare and contrast his behavior to the precepts set forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. Be specific.