

nobility of the idea, and Florence and Rome continued to be part of the intrigues of international politics. In 1527, while Clement VII, another Medici, was pope, the imperial army captured and desecrated Rome; as a consequence, Florence expelled the Medici and proclaimed the republic again. This last attempt of the city to regain its civic liberty was ended after three years by the intervention of Charles V, who helped the pope restore the Medici. Machiavelli's dying eyes beheld the spectacle of the total ruin of Italy.

MACHIAVELLI'S POLITICAL DOCTRINE

But, if *The Prince* failed in its primary aim, it succeeded in an even greater task, the foundation of a new science of statesmanship for which modern thought is very much indebted. The same passion which inspired the exhortation to liberate Italy urged Machiavelli to provide the invoked redeemer with a political system adequate to his enterprise. It is on this system that readers must focus their attention to understand the meaning and the value of Machiavelli's ideas.

The novelty of the system consists in the fact that Machiavelli was the first to view history and society as purely human and natural facts, free from supernatural and providential influence. He conceived his science with rational and inquisitive method and, in so doing, disentangled politics from the restraints of theology.

Machiavelli's starting point was the assumption that men, like nature, are subject to immutable laws. Men are always the same and are animated by the same passions that lead them fatally to the same decisions, acts, and results (*Discourses*, III, 43). From this assumption Machiavelli derives two conclusions: That one can foresee the course of political development by meditating upon the cycles and phases of historical events, and that essential to a statesman is not only the "experience of modern events and constant study of the past" but also the ability to exploit this knowledge in actual political actions.

The Prince is a lucid and perfect exposition of the way to exploit the lesson of history in politics. When undertaking his

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enterprises the prince must turn to means imposed by the practices of other statesmen, above all, contemporaries. So urgent indeed was the subject of the treatise that, contrary to his usual custom of deriving examples from antiquity, Machiavelli rarely departed from contemporary history, to which belongs the personage most inspiring to *The Prince*, Cesare Borgia. The image of the duke was transformed by Machiavelli's passion: he provided both the personification of his political ideas and the clue to the problem of morality in politics.

By a course of bloodshed and treason, Valentinois succeeded in extirpating the most abominable tyrants of Romagna. Then he formed a government that re-established order, tranquility, and prompt administration of justice among the inhabitants of that province, who began to prosper and conceive affection for the new ruler. Had Valentinois shown any hesitation, he would never have achieved the welfare of his state. From this consideration Machiavelli deduced the unequivocal conclusion that statecraft has ways and means of its own, which are entirely different from the ways and means of private morality. When the end is the welfare of the state there must never be vacillation, but daring adoption of those measures which are demanded by the nature of events. Such measures will always be justified when the ends are obtained.

He who achieves public good deserves as a prince everlasting glory, even if as a man he may be condemned for his cruelty. But when a prince hesitates, and through his hesitation damages his state, he must be considered wicked and incapable, even if the cause for being irresolute was a good one and as a private man he deserves the highest praise.

This part of the theory especially caused Machiavelli to be accused throughout the centuries of cruelty and immorality. But his accusers obviously failed to understand the autonomy of politics, which is the greatest novelty of the system. From all we have said, it is evident that according to Machiavelli politics not only is something detached from morality, but actually has a morality of its own.

Machiavelli himself was aware of the fact that he was entering upon a road never before trod by anyone, which "may lead me into trouble and difficulty, but may also be paved with gold" (*Discourses*, I, Pref.). He never prized cruelty in itself; instead he sometimes seemed to regret having to depart from traditional moral principles. But objective observation of reality and study of the past showed that men are "wicked, ungrateful, prone to dissimulation, afraid of danger, greedy of gain" (*The Prince*, XVII). Therefore in public affairs it is rarely possible to respect the moral principles required of private individuals, "because human conditions do not allow it." Machiavelli's only concern was effective reality of things; life as it ought to be remained outside his sphere of consideration.

BASIC THEMES OF *THE PRINCE*

The state is the highest achievement of man, a progressive and elaborate creation of his free will. The individual, the leader, the people, cooperate in forming and maintaining it.

Nothing is superior to the state, which is self-sufficient and absolutely supreme. One must love the state more than his own soul. No consideration of justness or unjustness, of cruelty or pity, of praise or shame, is to interfere with the decision of saving the state and preserving its freedom.

Military power is the foundation and the strength of the state. Persuasion alone is not enough because men are bad and inconstant. They easily forget the favors they receive: they are always eager for changes. Only the prince who has enough military power is able to maintain his dominion.

"Virtue" (from the Latin *virtus*) means courage, efficacy, talent, strength, ability, and, above all, intelligence. Politics is an art which requires an intelligent choice of means, an ingenious intuition, and a capability of acting with swiftness and precision. A politician must adapt himself to the various circumstances and the various individuals he encounters. He must sometimes caress, sometimes hurt; sometimes forgive, sometimes punish; sometimes benefit, sometimes

suppress. Once a policy has been chosen, the politician must act without hesitation to carry it to its completion. Uncertainty is false wisdom; to evade executing necessary measures, violent and cruel as they might be, is false pity. Uncertainty and hesitation are the opposite of virtue. Virtue is the essential quality of a prince; even though it is sometimes capable of subduing fortune.

Fortune is the arbiter of one half of human actions, the other half is directed by the will of men. Fortune and virtue alternate in Machiavelli's theory. Virtue should organize defense against fortune because fortune asserts her power when no dike restrains her. But when a suitable defense in the form of virtue holds her in check, fortune is unable to exert her influence to any significant extent, and she may be arrested entirely.

To take advantage of opportunities at the right moment is also part of virtue. In fact, fortune is inconstant and variable. Moreover, as a woman, she likes those who act with audacity, and she can be more easily conquered by those who beat her than by those who act coolly. Therefore, when one faces fortune he ought to be impetuous rather than cautious.

GENERAL SYNOPSIS

The Prince consists of twenty-six chapters, which can be grouped into four parts. Part one (Chapters 1-11) deals with principalities. It explains how many types of principalities exist and the means by which they are acquired.

Machiavelli distinguishes four types of principalities: hereditary, mixed, new, and ecclesiastical.

1. Hereditary principalities, like that of the Duke of Ferrara, are maintained with few difficulties, provided that the prince follows a conservative policy.
2. Mixed principalities originate from the addition of new territories to the hereditary state of conqueror-prince. This kind of

principality is maintained with greater difficulty than the basic hereditary type because men are inconstant: they change their ruler willingly, hoping to improve their condition, but, as soon as they realize that things have gone from bad to worse, they are ready to take up arms against the ruler. As to the problems confronted by the rulers of mixed principalities, Machiavelli specifies five solutions: conquerors should enter and install themselves in the newly acquired provinces, as was done by the Turks in Greece; set up colonies which will serve as links to the states of the prince; to become the head and protector of the less powerful neighboring territories; weaken the more powerful; take care that, for whatever reason, no foreign power may enter this province, thus avoiding the mistake of the Aetolians who brought the Romans into Greece.

3. Principalities acquired by a new prince, like most principalities of the Renaissance, can be further divided into four groups: those acquired by means of one's own arms and ability; those acquired by the arms of others or by fortune; those acquired through iniquity; and civic principalities.
 - a. New principalities acquired by means of one's own arms are maintained with some degree of difficulty. This depends entirely upon the greater or lesser leadership and military ability of him who obtains possession of the territory. Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus are the most outstanding examples of this ability. On the other hand, Girolamo Savonarola failed because he was an unarmed prophet.
 - b. Principalities acquired by the arms of others or by fortune are as easily lost as they are won. For example, Cesare Borgia, who became duke through the good fortune of his father, although prudent and competent, lost his state when the influence of his father declined.
 - c. Principalities acquired through iniquity cause infamy rather than glory. Those whom cruelty and inhumanity brought to power, like Agathocles of Sicily, cannot be considered outstanding men, even though they displayed courage and greatness of mind.

- d. **Civic principalities** are those obtained either by popular support or by the help of nobility. He who comes to power with the help of nobles maintains his position with great difficulty, since the nobles wish to become masters themselves. Conversely, power can be easily maintained when it is founded on the favor of the people, as in the case of Nabis, Prince of the Spartans, because people only ask of their prince not to be oppressed.
4. **Ecclesiastical principalities**, or those governed by religious institutions, are acquired with an element of difficulty either through ability or fortune. They are easily maintained, for they are sustained by the ancient ordinances of religion. The principalities of Alexander VI, Julius II, and Leo X are worthy examples of the ecclesiastical type.

Part two (Chapters 12-14) maintains that the strength of principalities rests above all with the armies, inasmuch as good armies also imply good laws.

Troops are of four different kinds: mercenary, auxiliary, national, and mixed.

Mercenary troops are always most dangerous, since they give way in a moment of trial, as was clearly proven when Charles VIII, King of France, invaded and conquered Italy with great ease.

Auxiliary troops are equally useless: they can be good in themselves, but are harmful and dangerous for the one who relies upon them. Julius II, in the battle against Ravenna, and Florence in the war against Pisa, reaped nothing but harm and danger from this choice.

Native troops are the best and the only ones which can assure safety to republics and princes. Cesare Borgia and Hiero of Syracuse were highly esteemed after they turned to forces of their own.

Mixed troops — that is, partly mercenary and partly national — are far superior to the mercenary or auxiliary alone, but greatly inferior to the native.

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Machiavelli concludes that war and its rules and discipline should be the only thought of a wise prince.

Part three (Chapters 15-23) deals with the prince and his qualities. According to Machiavelli a prince—following the examples of Julius II, Louis XII, and Ferdinand the Catholic—should be parsimonious rather than generous, in order not to burden the people with oppressive taxes.

Stinginess
A prince should also be cruel rather than clement, because it is more beneficial to be feared than loved, although he ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred. Cesare Borgia was regarded as a cruel man, but he reunited Romagna and restored it to peace; Hannibal's inhumane cruelty caused him to be revered by his soldiers; on the other hand, Scipio, being a most excellent but too clement a general, had his troops rebel against him.

A prince should care little for keeping his promises and should break faith whenever necessary for the welfare of his state. He should know how to play both the beast and the man, as the ancients tried to signify with the myth of Chiron the Centaur. Alexander well exemplifies this attitude.

A prince should not make himself despised or hated because this feeling will cause him certain ruin. Conspiracies, like the one against the house of Bentivogli, fail if the prince is not hated by the people. The kings of France, in this regard, made use of the parliament to restrain the arrogance of the nobles.

A prince should arm his own subjects, disarm and render weak the newly acquired states, cultivate dissensions in the towns subject to him, and win over as friends hostile subjects; but he must never reduce either old or new subjects to submission by means of fortresses.

A prince should gain esteem by displaying his strength in the fields of foreign policy, as did Ferdinand the Catholic, and domestic policy, like Bernabò Visconti. He should also avoid

neutrality and declare himself a friend or an enemy. He should encourage his citizens to devote themselves to trade, agriculture, and other activities which increase their prosperity.

A prince should select capable and faithful counselors. He should avoid flatterers, who are the scourges of courts. He should rely only on a few prudent men who will be allowed to speak freely and truthfully to him. Then he should deliberate by himself, as was the policy of the Emperor Maximilian of Germany.

Part four (Chapters 24-26) deals particularly with the political situation of Italy.

First Machiavelli considers why Italian princes have lost their states in their own time and he realizes that they all lacked arms of their own and that some did not know either how to conciliate the people or how to protect themselves against the nobles. Examples of this lack contemporary to Machiavelli were the King of Naples and the Duke of Milan.

Then Machiavelli comes to the discussion of how much influence fortune exerts upon human affairs. He maintains that fortune is the arbiter of one half of our actions, but the other half is governed by man's will. However, he concludes, it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for fortune is a woman, and it is necessary to beat her in order to keep her in subjection. Julius II is an example of acting impetuously and, therefore, successfully.

In the last chapter, which can be considered the key of the book, disclosing the patriotic intent of the author, Machiavelli addresses himself to a new prince with a vehement exhortation to make use of his teaching to free Italy from foreign domination.

SUMMARIES AND COMMENTARIES

CHAPTERS 1-2

Summary

All powers that rule over men are either republics or principalities. Principalities are either hereditary or new. The new principalities may be absolutely new, like the Dukedom of Milan of Francesco Sforza; partially new, as when a new province is annexed to an old state; or mixed, as was the vicereame of Naples of the King of Spain. The latter type is annexed either by the arms of others or by the prince himself; it may also be acquired by fortune or by special ability.

Machiavelli resolves to speak only of principalities and how they are maintained, having already discussed republics elsewhere. He begins with hereditary principalities.

The difficulties encountered by hereditary principalities are far fewer than the ones faced by new princes. An example of a hereditary prince is the Duke of Ferrara. In spite of his having been defeated by the Venetians and having been banished by Pope Julius II, the duke maintained his duchy because his family had exercised power in the state from ancient times and he never transgressed the customs of his ancestors.

It is natural that a hereditary prince would be more loved than a new one, for he has less necessity of giving offense. In fact, during a long domination, the reasons for making changes are forgotten. Indeed, innovations occur most often when there have been previous changes.

Commentary

In the first chapter Machiavelli states the major topic of the entire book: new principalities, which were so numerous during the Renaissance. Republics are discussed at length in the first book of the *Discourses*, which he had started to write before *The*