The Prince

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

Born to a citizen family of Florence, Machiavelli served as secretary and second chancellor to the Florentine Republic from 1498 to 1512. During his tenure Machiavelli worked as an official and diplomat, traveling on missions to Louis XII, Emperor Maximilian, and Cesare Borgia. Machiavelli's political fortune changed in 1512 when the Spanish invaded Florence and helped to reinstate the Medici, the ruling family of Florence prior to 1494. As a consequence Machiavelli, who worked for the same government that deposed the Medici in 1494, was tried for conspiracy, imprisoned, and tortured. After years of political exile, during which he wrote *The Prince*, Machiavelli reentered public life in the 1520s. Machiavelli died at the age of 58.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Prince is the product of the political turmoil that ravaged Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Within a divided Italy, the states of Florence, Venice, Naples, and Milan ruthlessly fought for control of the Italian peninsula. Meanwhile, the Roman papacy sought to enhance its earthly power through war and conquest. To make matters worse, the foreign powers of France, Spain, and the Holy Roman Empire took advantage of the divisiveness and joined the Italian conflict, shifting alliances and pitting states against one another in an effort to gain valuable territory for themselves. As a statesman and diplomat, Machiavelli possessed an insider's knowledge of these conflicts. After observing years of fratricidal conflict, Machiavelli called for a unified Italy in *The Prince* and described the type of leader who could make that unification a reality.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Prince bears the mark of its author's humanist education, which emphasized the works of Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Indeed, the Italian Renaissance centered on the rediscovery of ancient thinkers. Among the ancient works that influenced *The Prince*, Plato's *The Republic* discusses the structure and character of states and their citizens. The Roman philosopher Cicero's works of political history, such as *De re publica*, shaped Machiavelli's own political philosophy. Similarly, the Ancient Greek historian Xenophon, particularly in *Cryopaedia*, impacted Machiavelli's understanding of princely governance. In Machiavelli's own era, the English statesman Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) likewise pondered the balance between political pragmatism and high ideals; however, unlike *The Prince*, *Utopia* presents the hope of a peaceful, socialistic – and hence, "utopian" – society.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Prince*
- **When Written:** 1513-1514
- **Where Written:** Machiavelli's farm at Sant' Andrea in Percussina, seven miles south of Florence
- **When Published:** Manuscript copies of *The Prince* began to circulate in and around Florence circa 1516; printed versions first appeared in 1532.
- **Literary Period:** Italian Renaissance
- **Genre:** Political treatise
- **Setting:** Renaissance Italy
- **Climax:** Machiavelli urges Lorenzo dé Medici to use the tactics and strategies outlined in *The Prince* to unify war-ravaged Italy.
- **Antagonist:** The "malice" of fortune; inept rulers
- **Point of View:** First-person narration by Machiavelli

EXTRA CREDIT

What's in a name? The adjective "Machiavellian" derives from Machiavelli's name, referring to a person who uses cunning tricks and dishonesty to achieve his ends. First appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1626, the word came into use following the widespread circulation of *The Prince*. "Machiavellian" is also used as a psychological term, referring to a personality type that tends towards manipulation and exhibits a lack of empathy.

The Machiavelli Fan Club. Among *The Prince's* many well-known devotees were English monarch Henry VIII, French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, American president John Adams, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

PLOT SUMMARY

In *The Prince* Niccolò Machiavelli shrewdly outlines the strategies that a ruler must follow to maintain his position and govern his state. With a clear and direct authorial voice, Machiavelli employs ancient and contemporary examples to illustrate the pragmatic tactics of successful leaders. Dedicating his book to the Florentine ruler Lorenzo dé Medici, Machiavelli draws heavily on his own political experience to support his exceedingly realistic views on human nature and

the techniques of able rulers. Contradicting conventional morality, Machiavelli advises wise princes to use violence and cunning to safeguard their states. *The Prince* explores the careful balance between contrasts, comparing virtue and vice, prowess and fortune, and subjects and rulers.

At the start of the treatise Machiavelli asks Lorenzo to accept *The Prince* as a "token of my devotion," stating that his "long acquaintance" with political affairs and "continuous study of the **ancient world**" inform his writing. In the first chapters Machiavelli outlines the scope of *The Prince*, declaring his focus on the various types of princes and principalities. Arguing that new principalities pose greater difficulties than hereditary states, Machiavelli segues into a discussion of composite principalities, in which new states form an "appendage to an old state." Within this context, Machiavelli raises the guiding principals of *The Prince*, encouraging rulers to cultivate the "goodwill" of the people and to study the art of warfare. Machiavelli urges princes to approach political disorders like "**a wasting disease**," taking care to diagnose and treat them quickly and resolutely.

Citing Cyrus and Romulus, Machiavelli turns to a discussion of prowess, imploring "prudent" rulers to follow the examples of "great men." Machiavelli writes that men who become rulers by prowess "gain their principalities with difficulty but hold them with ease." Conversely, those who gain power through fortune become rulers easily but maintain their position "only by considerable exertion." Naming Cesare Borgia as a contemporary ruler who gained his status through fortune, Machiavelli praises the "strong foundations" that Borgia laid for his future but laments "the extraordinary and inordinate malice of fortune" that eventually ruined the unlucky duke.

Machiavelli declares that every stable state shares the same foundations, "good laws and good arms." However, Machiavelli places an emphasis on good arms, explaining that good laws "inevitably follow" from military might. Machiavelli warns rulers to avoid the use of mercenary and auxiliary troops, on which he blames "the present ruin of Italy" and the earlier downfall of the Roman Empire. According to Machiavelli, "The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war," and he encourages princes to study warfare in peacetime so that they may "reap the profit in times of adversity."

While laying out his guidelines for a prince's moral conduct, Machiavelli blurs the traditional border between virtue and vice. Machiavelli argues that a prince must adhere to a unique standard of morality, often acting "in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, [and] of religion" in order to safeguard his state. The challenges of governance require rulers to reverse the general relationship between virtues and vices, although Machiavelli encourages clever princes to maintain the appearance of virtue. On the question of "whether it is better to be loved than feared," Machiavelli asserts that it is preferable to be feared if the prince cannot "be both the one and the other." Above all else, a prince must "escape being hated" by his people, which he can accomplish if he does not rob his subjects of their property. Machiavelli urges rulers to maintain a "flexible disposition," mimicking the behavior of **the fox and the lion** to secure their position.

Addressing the distinction between prowess and fortune, Machiavelli contends that fortune controls half of human affairs, leaving the other half to free will. Machiavelli advises princes to "take precautions" against the "malice of fortune," using prowess to prepare for unpredictability. Turning to contemporary Italy, Machiavelli blames the weakness of its states on the political shortcomings of its rulers. Machiavelli concludes by imploring Lorenzo to use the lessons of *The Prince* to unify war-torn Italy and thus reclaim the grandeur of Ancient Rome.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Niccolò Machiavelli – Machiavelli serves as both the narrator and a protagonist of *The Prince*. When released from prison in 1513, Machiavelli retreated to private life and wrote *The Prince* in an effort both to gain the favor of the ruling Medici family, which had accused Machiavelli of conspiracy and to help enable Lorenzo de Medici to unify Italy. Machiavelli's narration is direct, pragmatic, and authoritative and he uses examples from both **antiquity** and his own life to illustrate the principles of governance.

Lorenzo dé Medici – The ruler of Florence from 1514 to 1519, Lorenzo dé Medici was part of the influential Medici family and the dedicatee of *The Prince*. Lorenzo was the nephew of pope Leo X, who appointed Lorenzo the Duke of Urbino. In *The Prince* Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to unify Italy, although it is unlikely that Lorenzo ever read *The Prince*.

Cesare Borgia – The illegitimate son of pope Alexander VI, Cesare Borgia pursued military campaigns throughout Italy with the aid of his powerful father. After a series of impressive victories, Borgia's power diminished following Alexander's death in 1503. Borgia eventually lost his conquests and died in 1507. During diplomatic missions Machiavelli closely studied Borgia's tactics. Machiavelli praises Borgia's prowess but laments the "malice" of fortune that led to his downfall.

Alexander VI – Elected pope in 1492, Alexander VI was a skilled politician and leader who considerably expanded the territorial power of the Catholic Church through diplomacy and warfare. Infamous for the corruption of his papacy, Alexander sired several illegitimate children, including Cesare Borgia, whom he lavished with appointments and military funding. Alexander died in 1503.

Ferdinand of Aragon – With his wife, Isabella I of Castile,

Ferdinand of Aragon united Spain and funded the conquest of the New World. Ruling from 1475 to 1516, Ferdinand domestically pursued a centralizing policy and developed a foreign policy that centered on conquest and the containment of rival powers, such as France. Machiavelli praises Ferdinand's prowess and his ability to maintain an "outstanding" reputation.

Leo X – Elected pope in 1513, Leo X was a member of the Medici family of Florence. As pope, Leo continued the warring policies of his predecessor, Julius II, and engaged in costly campaigns throughout Italy. Leo was a patron of the Italian Renaissance and used his clout to appoint relatives, such as Lorenzo dé Medici, to positions of power.

Maximilian – As Holy Roman Emperor from 1508 to 1519, Maximilian was a perennial opponent of the French and Venetians. His reign was marked by frequent forays into Italian affairs, largely motivated by his desire to regain territory from Venice. A lack of funding and the threat of French retaliation prevented Maximilian from maintaining a consistent foreign policy.

Charles VIII – King of France from 1483 to 1498, Charles VIII invaded Italy in 1494, subduing Florence before marching to Naples. As a result of Charles' incursion into Florence, the ruling Medici family was deposed, leading to the reestablishment of the Florentine Republic. Charles was unable to maintain his conquered territory and died while preparing for a second invasion.

Louis XII – The successor of Charles VIII of France, Louis XII continued the Italian campaigns pursued by his predecessor, conquering Milan in 1500 and Naples in 1501. Machiavelli criticizes Louis' early decision to ally himself with Alexander VI, which weakened Louis. Machiavelli argues that Louis, "Having made this first mistake . . . was forced into others."

Francesco Sforza – A skilled mercenary who fought for Filippo Visconti, the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza married Visconti's daughter in 1441. When Visconti died, Sforza used his military prowess and his marriage to seize control of the state, installing himself as Duke of Milan. Machiavelli cites Sforza as a ruler who successfully gained and preserved his power through prowess.

Ludovico Sforza – The son of Francesco Sforza, Ludovico ruled as Duke of Milan from 1489 to 1500. Known as Il Moro, Ludovico was a ruthless ruler and a famous patron of the Italian Renaissance. Ludovico's use of mercenary troops and his failed attempts to pit foreign powers against one another ultimately led to his downfall.

Hannibal – The commander of the army of Carthage, an enemy of Rome. Hannibal invaded the Roman Republic during the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C.), marching into Italy through the Iberian Peninsula and the Alps. Although Hannibal failed to conquer Rome and suffered defeat in Africa, Machiavelli praises Hannibal for the "virtue" of "cruelty," which he used to maintain control of his army.

Commodus – The son and heir of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus ruled Rome from 180 to 193 A.D. The opposite of his father, Commodus "was of a cruel, bestial disposition" and was despised by the people, which caused him to lose his position despite his hereditary right to the throne. Commodus was assassinated in 193 A.D.

L. Septimius Severus – A military commander under Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, Severus became emperor of Rome in 193 A.D. Machiavelli praises Severus as a "remarkable and outstanding . . . new prince" and applauds his ability "to act the part of both **a fox and a lion**." Severus' prowess allowed him to establish and maintain his new status as emperor.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Julius II – Reigning as pope from 1503 to 1513, Julius II supported Renaissance artists and boldly enhanced the territorial power of the Catholic Church. An able diplomat and strategist, Julius successfully curbed the influence of the Roman barons and waged war against domestic and foreign foes on the Italian peninsula.

Cyrus – Cyrus was the founder of the Persian Empire. Under his control, the empire spanned from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus River, making it the largest empire in the world at that time. He died in battle in 529 B.C. Machiavelli celebrates Cyrus' skill in warfare and governance.

Alexander the Great – Alexander became King of Macedonia in 336 B.C. An extraordinarily talented ruler and military strategist, Alexander conquered Greece, Persia, and much of Asia, invading India in 327 B.C. Machiavelli praises Alexander as an exemplary ancient prince.

Romulus – The mythical founder and first king of Rome. According to legend, Romulus killed his twin brother, Remus, when the brothers argued over the site for the foundation of a new city. Romulus won and named the city Rome after himself.

Julius Caesar – A successful Roman military leader, Julius Caesar became dictator of Rome and was eventually assassinated by political rivals in 44 B.C. Machiavelli states that Caesar established his power with the goodwill of the people, using the spoils of war to reward his subjects.

Marcus Aurelius – Ruled as Roman Emperor from 161 to 180 A.D. Machiavelli argues that Marcus Aurelius, who "loved justice, hated cruelty [and was] kind and courteous," maintained his position only because he "succeeded to the empire by hereditary right." During his successful reign, Rome faced considerable internal and external threats.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-

coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LAWS AND ARMS

Machiavelli asserts that the "main foundations" of every state are "good laws and good arms," meaning that a ruler must anchor his state to sound legal and military codes if he wishes to maintain his power. Without this two-fold foundation, Machiavelli argues that the state and its prince are "bound to come to grief." Yet while Machiavelli states that both laws and military might are necessary for the survival of the prince and his state, he nonetheless places an emphasis on martial strength, arguing that one cannot have "good laws without good arms" and that "good laws inevitably follow" from good arms.

The Prince consistently trumpets the overriding importance of military prowess in the maintenance of principalities, discussing armed troops, fortifications, and strategies of warfare at length throughout the book. Machiavelli advises his royal reader to focus first and foremost on "war, its organizations, and its discipline," cautioning, "The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war." Lacking a robust understanding of warfare and preparation for its "physical and mental" challenges, even a state with the best laws will fall prey to internal or external foes. Machiavelli advises a ruler to study warfare in times of peace, so that he may "reap the profit" when war inevitably comes.

FORTUNE AND PROWESS

According to Machiavelli, the twin forces of fortune and prowess conspire to determine the outcome of history and, therefore, the success or failure of all princes and states. With the term "fortune," Machiavelli refers to the unpredictability of fate, meaning the ways in which chance, opportunity, and pure luck often influence the course of life. In opposition to fortune, Machiavelli places the idea of "prowess," referencing the skills and abilities that men possess and use to exert control over their circumstances. Machiavelli states that some new princes may gain their states through prowess, and others through fortune; however, a prince cannot *maintain* his hold on a state without a certain degree of skill and prowess. When the actions of a prince "are marked by prowess," he may easily "capture" the allegiance of his soldiers and citizens. Nonetheless, even the ablest ruler, if met with bad fortune or the wrong set of circumstances, may lose his state. Machiavelli argues that a prince needs both fortune and prowess to maintain his power, stating that fortune is "probably . . . the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves." Rulers prosper as long as fortune and their prowess are "in accord."

Machiavelli uses a variety of metaphors to refer to fortune, most notably calling it a "violent river" and a "woman." Machiavelli states that a wise ruler must "take precautions" against abrupt changes in fortune, in the same way in which people construct "dykes and embankments" to tame rivers in anticipation of future floods. When comparing fortune to a woman, Machiavelli declares that to make fortune womanly and "submissive," it is necessary "to beat and coerce her" in order to exercise one's will. According to Machiavelli, fortune, like a woman, is fickle, but she responds better to a ruler's strength and conviction than to cautiousness. While Machiavelli's metaphor likely strikes a modern reader as sexist, it would have been unlikely to trouble his sixteenth-century male audience.

GOODWILL AND HATRED

Machiavelli is probably most famous for his opinion concerning "whether it is better to be loved than feared." But according to Machiavelli, a wise prince may be better served by focusing on the distinction between goodwill and hatred. Above all else, a ruler "must only endeavor . . . to escape being hated," for the "best fortress that exists is to avoid being hated by the people." Of only slightly lesser importance, the prince must cultivate the goodwill and respect of the people. Machiavelli asserts that if a ruler has the goodwill of the people, then he need not worry about "conspiracies" and similar threats. However, goodwill and hatred are not synonymous with love and fear, respectively. Machiavelli declares that "fear is quite compatible with an absence of hatred," while love is not necessarily a prerequisite for goodwill, which a prince may earn by demonstrating prowess and protecting the people. If a prince cannot be both loved and feared, which Machiavelli declares the desired condition, then it is "far better to be feared," so long as that fear does not transform into hatred.

Machiavelli tells his audience that a prince can "always" evade hatred if he avoids robbing his subjects of their property and women. The people remain "content" while they remain in possession of their property and "their honor," and Machiavelli cynically asserts, "Men sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony [i.e., property]." Machiavelli also clarifies his pronouncements by stating that "a reputation for cruelty" does not necessarily lead to hatred. Machiavelli argues that certain situations, such as the disciplining of an army, demand cruelty to instill order, which can result in the people's fear and respect of their leader's prowess.

VIRTUE VS. VICE

In *The Prince* Machiavelli blurs the line between virtue and vice, arguing that, for princes, the value of an action rests solely on the context and end result of its performance. Virtue and vice are not fixed terms,

and Machiavelli states that a prince "will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practices them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity." In his extremely pragmatic approach to princely conduct, Machiavelli says that rulers "must be prepared not to be virtuous," since the performance of certain vices is "necessary for safeguarding the state." In Machiavelli's opinion regarding virtue and vice, a prince must hold himself to a different standard, apart from the rest of society. Contrary to typical morals, a wise prince must often "act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, [and] of religion," sometimes breaking his word or inflicting pain. A prince must know "how to do evil, if that is necessary," but must also strive to maintain the appearance of virtue in front of observers. Opponents of Machiavelli have referred to his methods as ruthless, although Machiavelli defended his "practical" advice as representing the reality of the world and human nature.

THE MASSES AND THE ELITE

Machiavelli regularly juxtaposes the masses, or "common people," against the ruling elite in *The Prince*. To justify his decision to write the book, Machiavelli invokes this class-based contrast, stating, "To comprehend fully the nature of princes one must be an ordinary citizen." As with other opposing pairs described in *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues that the two entities, while vastly different, rely on each other for mutual survival and understanding. The "friendship" of the people forms a central component of the prince's power, since the goodwill of the people guards the prince against conspiracies and allows the prince to raise formidable citizen armies. In return, the prudent prince protects the property and honor of his subjects, which also ensures his own survival. The people and the prince share a symbiotic relationship, although the masses hold the unique ability to crown and dethrone princes in certain circumstances.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE FOX AND THE LION

Machiavelli uses the metaphor of **the fox and the lion** to explain the combination of cunning and strength that a prince must possess in order to maintain control of his state. Machiavelli stresses that a prince must learn how to imitate both the fox and the lion so that he may draw on the necessary attributes of these "beasts" when circumstances demand it. According to Machiavelli, a prudent ruler must adapt to new situations and problems, acting as a fox "in order to recognize traps" and as a lion when he must "frighten off wolves." Machiavelli argues that the lion "is defenseless against traps" while the fox "is defenseless against wolves" and other physical threats; therefore, a prince must mimic the behavior of both types of beasts in order to benefit from their complementary talents and to overcome their differing weaknesses. As a fox, the prince can use cunning statecraft and diplomacy to sidestep traps and other pitfalls. As a lion, the prince can use physical force in order to maintain his power over his subjects and enemies. Taken individually, neither of these talents will spell a prince's success; but combined, the diversified skillset – political cunning backed by the threat of physical force – is formidable. The fox and the lion represent a meeting of opposites and a wise ruler will strive to master and combine the unique skills of both beasts.

THE ANCIENT WORLD

Like his fellow Renaissance humanists, Machiavelli celebrated the achievements of **the ancient world**, championing the writings and accomplishments of Ancient Greek, Roman, and other Mediterranean civilizations. Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli invokes the great deeds and writings of the ancients, citing the Roman emperor Julius Caesar, the Greek historian Xenophon, the Persian ruler Cyrus, and the Carthaginian general Hannibal, among many others. Machiavelli frequently employs well-known ancient examples in order to illustrate the strategies and tactics outlined in *The Prince*, using the triumphs and foibles of ancient leaders in order to communicate and support his views on contemporary statecraft and warfare. Notably, Machiavelli uses antiquity in order to justify his call for Italian unification at the end of *The Prince*, quoting the Italian Renaissance poet Petrarch. Petrarch's pronouncement that the "old Romane valour [*sic*]" lives in the hearts of contemporary Italians suggested that Italians would soon take up the banner of unification, restoring the divided Italian peninsula to its Roman-era grandeur. Likewise, Machiavelli believed that he and his Italian countrymen were the rightful heirs of the Roman Empire and he sought to inspire Lorenzo dé Medici to fulfill his duty to reunify Italy and thus reclaim the rich cultural inheritance of antiquity.

DISEASE

Machiavelli uses **disease** as a metaphor for the problems and pitfalls that plague princes and their states. Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli refers to political disorders as a "wasting disease," a pestilence that at first is "easy to cure but difficult to diagnose" and, if untreated, becomes "easy to diagnose but difficult to cure." In other words, Machiavelli cautions a ruler to detect problems in his state "well in advance" so that the troubles may be treated and cured

before they become too widespread to remedy. If diagnosed early and accurately, then political disorders "can be quickly healed." Nonetheless, Machiavelli states that many rulers lack this skill of early detection, arguing, "Only a prudent ruler has such foresight." Similarly, Machiavelli refers to rulers who fall prey to flattery as "victims" of the "plague" of self-deception. In short, wise rulers must use their prowess to guard their states – the "body politic," so to speak – against diseases that result from political disorder and other internal and external threats.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *The Prince* published in 2003.

Preface Quotes

Nor I hope will it be considered presumptuous for a man of low and humble status to dare discuss and lay down the law about how princes should rule; because, just as men who are sketching the landscape put themselves down in the plain to study the nature of the mountains and the highlands, and to study the low-lying land they put themselves high on the mountain, so, to comprehend fully the nature of people, one must be a prince, and to comprehend fully the nature of princes one must be an ordinary citizen.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3-4

Explanation and Analysis

In the preface to his book, Machiavelli lays out his "plan" to explain the ways of Italian royalty. Machiavelli aims to tell his audience, Lorenzo de Medici, how to rule his people successfully. Right away, Machiavelli's project seems a little odd--why does Lorenzo *need* someone to tell him how to rule, and furthermore, why should Machiavelli, an ordinary citizen, be the one to teach Lorenzo?

Machiavelli claims that he is the ideal teacher for Lorenzo, precisely *because* he is an ordinary citizen. Someone like Machiavelli can describe how successful princes rule, because he has the advantage of witnessing the effects of a ruler's actions on the masses. Since *The Prince* is largely about how to create the perception of majesty and grandeur, Machiavelli's argument makes sense: he will show Lorenzo how to act in such a way that Lorenzo will shock and awe his subjects.

It's crucial to notice how transgressive Machiavelli's project is. Machiavelli's arguments contradict hundreds of years of European tradition, in which ordinary people were expressly forbidden to talk about their rulers or understand how they conducted their lives. It's even been suggested (by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci) that *The Prince* is a work of satire, designed to poke holes in the illusions of majesty that all rulers try to create, exposing the true pettiness and ugliness of the monarchy.

And if, from your lofty peak, Your Magnificence will sometimes glance down to these low-lying regions, you will realize the extent to which, undeservedly, I have to endure the great and unremitting malice of fortune.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker), Lorenzo dé Medici

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In real life, Machiavelli had fallen on hard times when he wrote *The Prince*--there had been a civil war in Florence, and Machiavelli had backed the wrong leaders against the Medici family. After the Medicis rose to power, Machiavelli was in serious danger of losing his life. In order to save his life, Machiavelli tried to make a peace offering to Lorenzo de Medici, writing him a book in which he praised Lorenzo for his greatness. Here, Machiavelli insists that his low position isn't the result of disloyalty of any kind--he's just been "unlucky."

The passage is important because it lends a certain amount of urgency and self-interest to *The Prince*. The author of the book, we can see, is just as selfish and cunning as the ideal prince he's trying to create--one could say that Machiavelli is performing the very qualities that he supports in Lorenzo de Medici.

Chapter 2 Quotes

The fact is that the natural prince has less reason and less need to give offense; and so it follows that he should be more loved; and if he does not provoke hatred by extraordinary vices, it stands to reason that his subjects should naturally be well disposed towards him. And in the antiquity and persistence of his rule memories of innovations and the reasons for them disappear; because one change always leaves a toothing-stone for the next.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli describes the ideal situation for a powerful ruler: to be part of a family that has ruled the area for a long period of time. It's best for a prince to be in such a situation, because he won't have to prove his worth or importance to his people--the mere fact of his family connection is enough.

It might seem odd to think that family connection could be such an important part of a monarch's popularity--surely the fact that he's incompetent or unlikable should count for something. Machiavelli doesn't deny either possibility--nevertheless, Machiavelli lived in a time when family was a near-sacred institution, and heredity was seen as being far more important than it is today. To be the son of a great man meant being a great man oneself.

Nevertheless, it is the *absence* of the perfect conditions described in the passage that leads Machiavelli to write his book. In a time of civil war and widespread distrust of government, Machiavelli will show new princes without family connections how to dominate their new subjects.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ For always, no matter how powerful one's armies, in order to enter a country one needs the goodwill of the inhabitants.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8-9

Explanation and Analysis

Machiavelli describes two basic ways for a prince to stay in power: hard and soft power. A prince has the huge advantage of controlling a large army--he can always use "hard power" of this kind to dominate his people, arrest disloyal subjects, intimidate people into submission, etc. Yet it's not enough for a prince to use hard power--even the largest army in the world can't quell every potential rebellion. Instead, a prince needs to appeal to his people's positive desires and needs: he has to convince his people that he is a likable person, and that it's in his people's own best interest to accept him as a ruler. By using "soft power" in such a way, the prince can count on the longstanding loyalty of his people, eliminating the possibilities of civil war and rebellion.

❝ If the ruler wants to keep hold of his new possessions, he must bear two things in mind: first, that the family of the old prince must be destroyed; next, that he must change neither their laws nor their taxes.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Machiavelli draws a distinction between the vast changes that sometimes take place at the highest levels of government (i.e., when a prince defeats his opponents and gains control of new territory) and the banality of the average citizen's life. The point is that a *new* prince stands the best chance of keeping his new territories when he interferes with his new subjects' lives as little as possible; i.e., when he doesn't increase taxes or laws in any substantial way.

There's an old adage in politics: as long as there's no draft and no depression, the people will obey. In this passage, Machiavelli makes a similar point: people will willingly accept any new leaders, provided that their day-to-day lives stay the same. The best way to avoid a rebellion? Don't give the people a reason to rebel.

❝ The Romans did what all wise rulers must: cope not only with present troubles but also with ones likely to arise in the future, and assiduously forestall them. When trouble is sensed well in advance it can be easily remedied; if you wait for it to show itself any medicine will be too late because the disease will have become incurable. As the doctors say of a wasting disease, to start with it is easy to cure but difficult to diagnose; after a time . . . it becomes easy to diagnose but difficult to cure. So it is in politics.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli praises the Roman politicians of antiquity for their attention to the details of society. By studying society carefully, the Roman leaders gave themselves a huge advantage: they could spot a potential problem early on and nip it in the bud.

The passage is important for a number of reasons. First, it exemplifies the Renaissance's emphasis on antiquity. During Machiavelli's lifetime, Italy rose to cultural prominence by reviving the spirit of the pre-Christian era; the era of Rome and Greece (and, in Machiavelli's opinion, a time before the vanilla rules of mercy and love were celebrated). Second, the passage establishes Machiavelli as one of the founders of modern political science. Machiavelli recognizes the importance of careful observation and study for governors and rulers. By understanding historical precedents and also getting the most current information about their subjects, rulers can use these tools to maintain power. In short, Machiavelli wants rulers to treat governing like a science--political science.

❝ The Romans . . . never, to avoid a war, allowed them [their troubles] to go unchecked, because they knew that there is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantage of others.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Here Machiavelli praises the Roman rulers of antiquity for their willingness to fight to the death to maintain power. Machiavelli proposes a rule for politics: once war becomes a possibility, it is inevitable.

Why is war inevitable? Machiavelli implies that it's the natural instinct of all rulers to maintain and expand their power--thus, when two sides become locked in a conflict for power, neither side will ever really back down. The only way to settle the conflict is to fight to the death.

Machiavelli's analysis of war is surprising because it's so amoral. Machiavelli never brings up concepts like right and wrong, good and evil, or justice and mercy--whatever one believes about love, Christianity, etc., violence is inevitable. Critics debate over whether Machiavelli is being prescriptive or descriptive here; i.e., whether he believes that the world really is an amoral, unmerciful place, or whether he thinks there's a place for religion, love, and affection, but it's outside the scope of politics.

❝ We can deduce a general rule, which never or rarely fails to apply: that whoever is responsible for another's becoming powerful ruins himself, because this power is brought into being either by ingenuity or by force, and both of these are suspect to the one who has become powerful.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Machiavelli argues here that there can never be two great leaders at the same time on the same side. As a ruler ascends to power, he might require another person's help. But when the ruler succeeds in obtaining power, he'll immediately dispose of his ally (if he's smart)--if the ally was smart enough to win the ruler his power, then he's smart enough to defeat the ruler, too.

Historians have pointed out that before the modern era, there was never a country in which there were two first-rate tactical minds in power at the same time--the stronger or savvier figure always killed the weaker opponent. In this way, Machiavelli's rule seems to be correct: there's only room for one leader at a time.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Indeed, there is no surer way of keeping possession than by devastation. Whoever becomes the master of a city accustomed to freedom, and does not destroy it, may expect to be destroyed himself.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli describes how to control a new territory that was previously a republic. The danger here, Machiavelli notes, is that the people have become accustomed to being free and self-determining; therefore, the presence of a new ruler is seen as a hateful thing. The only sensible thing for the new ruler to do in such a situation is to wipe out all traces of republicanism in the territory--otherwise, the people will inevitably rise up against the leader.

The passage is remarkable because it makes it clear that the people are dangerous--indeed, they're always more powerful than their leader. (Strangely, Machiavelli might be a democrat at heart--unlike his contemporaries, he's perfectly willing to admit that the masses are more powerful than the monarchy.)A tyrant is no match for a republican territory, full of thousands of people accustomed to freedom. Therefore, the ruler's only hope is to kill his subjects before they kill him.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Men who become rulers by prowess . . . acquire their principalities with difficulty but hold them with ease. The difficulties they encounter in acquiring their principalities arise partly because of the new institutions and laws they are forced to introduce in founding the state and making themselves secure. It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating changes in a state's constitution.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

So far, Machiavelli has been talking about hereditary rulers and conquerors of new territories that were previously controlled by a different ruler. Here, though, Machiavelli begins talking about a different situation: a ruler who conquers a territory in which there's no tradition of law and government in place.

The problem with acquiring a new territory without a tradition of government is that the people will be reluctant to submit to authority for the first time in their history. As Machiavelli says, "initiating" government is incredibly difficult. The implication is that government is unnatural and foreign to the human spirit--when it's introduced, humans' first impulse is to reject it immediately. It's precisely because humans' natural instinct is to reject government that Machiavelli writes *The Prince*--he needs to show Lorenzo how to con his subjects into accepting his authority.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ So it should be noted that when he seizes a state the new ruler must determine all the injuries that he will need to inflict. He must inflict them once for all . . . and in that way . . . win them [his subjects] over to him when he confers benefits. Whoever acts otherwise . . . can never depend on his subjects because they . . . can never feel secure with regard to him. Violence must be inflicted once for all; people will then forget what it tastes like and so be less resentful. Benefits must be conferred gradually; and in that way they will taste better.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli describes how a prince should inflict punishment on his people: quickly and decisively. By contrast, a good prince will offer benefits to his people very slowly, so that they're especially grateful to the ruler for providing them in the first place.

Machiavelli describes the ruler's subjects as if they're animals that need to be trained to be obedient. Like the owner of a naughty dog, the prince must punish his people immediately after they've disobeyed him, so that the lesson he teaches will be crystal-clear: disobey me and I'll hurt you. On the other hand, a prince must reward his people gradually, recognizing that he's trying to make his people grateful to him and dependent on his generosity. In short, Machiavelli shows that pain is a far better motivator than pleasure: pain's lessons are immediate and shocking, while pleasure's lessons are slow and gradual.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ I shall only conclude that it is necessary for a prince to have the friendship of the people; otherwise he has no remedy in times of adversity.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Here, in one sentence, is the basic message of *The Prince*: a successful ruler needs to convince his people to like him, by any means necessary. The reason is simple: there will come a day when a prince's position is insecure, and in such situations, the prince will need to rely on his people's support. By convincing (or conning) his people to love him when he is powerful, a good prince will buy some "insurance" for the future.

Machiavelli's point is both deeply cynical and strangely optimistic. On one hand, Machiavelli treats government like an amoral activity with only one goal: maintaining power at any cost. And yet the unspoken message of the passage is fundamentally democratic: Machiavelli acknowledges that the people are powerful and dangerous--that's why a good prince needs to get the people on his side.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ A prince must build on sound foundations; otherwise he is bound to come to grief. 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 attentions to arms.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli describes the "skeleton" of a successful state. A good leader, he argues, will establish a state that is based on two kinds of authority: the authority of law and the authority of force. Strangely, Machiavelli refuses to discuss the law in any detail: as he sees it, the law can be understood by understanding force. It's worth thinking about what Machiavelli means in more detail.

As Machiavelli sees it, people have one and only one reason for obeying the laws: if they don't, they'll be severely punished by the state's forces (soldiers, police officers, etc.). At the time, Machiavelli's claim must have seemed pretty shocking in its bluntness--people still like to believe that they obey law (the laws of society, the laws of religion, etc.) because the laws themselves are "right." Machiavelli disagrees: if it weren't for force, he insists, nobody would obey the laws. Machiavelli's basic view of human nature, then, is chaotic--he thinks that humans are naturally disobedient creatures who will refuse to obey laws of any kind unless threatened with physical punishment. Thus, the only way to understand law is to understand physical punishment.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Wise princes, therefore, have always shunned auxiliaries and made use of their own forces. They have preferred to lose battles with their own forces than win them with others, in the belief that no true victory is possible with alien arms. . . . In short, armor belonging to someone else either drops off you or weighs you down or is too tight.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Here Machiavelli synthesizes several of his most important points (see quotes above) to argue that a prince should never make use of someone else's army. Although Machiavelli doesn't go into much detail about *why* a prince should maintain his own army, the reasons should be clear to anyone who's been reading the book so far. First, the passage presupposes that force is the most important part of a state's stability, one of the clearest points Machiavelli has made so far. If the army isn't totally loyal to the prince, the prince's subjects probably aren't, either. Second,Machiavelli has already argued that the state is too small for two leaders. By hiring someone else's army, a prince runs the risk of empowering a group that's loyal to another commander--if the commander's army is successful in maintaining order, the commander poses a threat to the prince's power. (It's also worth noting that Machiavelli bases his argument on Roman history--Gaius Marius's establishment of an auxiliary army is often credited with catalyzing the fall of the Roman Republic.)

Chapter 14 Quotes

A prince, therefore, must 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. . . . The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli reduces the prince's responsibilities to military prowess. No prince can succeed for long without knowledge of the art of war, he insists.The best way to avoid a literal war is to be prepared for it at all times.

Machiavelli's point might seem like a bit of an oversimplification--Machiavelli has described plenty of duties a prince must fulfill, not all of which are concerned with literal war. Yet in another sense, one could argue that the passage sums up the entirety of *The Prince*. Machiavelli argues that a prince's various duties are just different *forms* of war, waged in many different capacities. As Foucault said, governments wage war on their own people. Machiavelli shows the prince fighting a constant war with his subjects: negotiating with them for power; executing them for disobedience; wiping out traitors, rewarding loyalty, etc. In short, governing is all about the effective use of force--the waging of war.

A wise prince . . . must never take things easy in times of peace, but rather use the latter assiduously, in order to be able to reap the profit in times of adversity. Then, when his fortunes change, he will be found ready to resist adversity.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Here Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to use prosperity to his advantage. A good prince, he argues, is always thinking two steps ahead--in times of peace and wealth, a prince will use his wealth to buy his people's love and support, so that in leaner years, the people will remember the prince's "generosity" and remain on his side.

The passage provides an important reminder that being a prince is hard, constant work. Even in good times, a prince can't rest on his laurels; he needs to prepare for the future, recognizing that the good times won't last forever. As Machiavelli sees it, every moment offers an opportunity to the leader of a territory--the leader can either seize the opportunity or squander it.

Chapter 15 Quotes

The gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done moves towards self-destruction rather than self-preservation. 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 be prepared not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to his need.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage Machiavelli makes a point he's been implying throughout the entire book. Morality, he claims, is more or less irrelevant to good government. A good ruler must be willing to break the rules of religion, "sinning" in order to maintain his power. For Machiavelli, the highest value isn't good; it's survival and power. Therefore, when confronted with a moral dilemma, a clever prince will always sacrifice the lesser value (morality) in favor of the higher goal, his own power.

Critics have offered many different interpretations of this passage. Is Machiavelli really advocating for amoral, nihilistic rulers? Most say that he is--hence the word "Machiavellian," still synonymous with the ruthless drive for power and control. But some have argued that Machiavelli is making a more subtle point. Perhaps Machiavelli *does* believe in right and wrong; instead of arguing that princes should break the laws of Christianity to maintain power, he's just illustrating the basic conflict between power and morality. Some have even suggested that Machiavelli is satirizing the tyrants of his day, exposing their fundamental lack of principles.

Chapter 17 Quotes

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. One can make this generalization about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit. . . . Men worry less about doing an injury to one who makes himself loved than to one who makes himself feared. . . . but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

This is the most famous passage in *The Prince*. Machiavelli poses a question: is it more important for a leader to be loved or feared? In the end, Machiavelli argues that it's better for people to be frightened of their leaders, because fear is a more powerful motivator than love. When people love their leader, they'll be loyal, but in the end, they'll prioritize their own self-interest and disobey. On the other hand, when the people fear their leader, their own desire to survive will compel them to obey at all times, ensuring a stable society.

Notice that Machiavelli doesn't advocate love *or* fear; he argues that both are necessary for a successful prince, even if fear is ultimately more powerful. Critics have pointed to the passage as an example of Machiavelli's deification of the head of state. In Christianity, there is a long tradition of both loving and fearing God--here, Machiavelli essentially argues that people should treat their leader like a god, to be obeyed at all times. (Some critics have argued that Machiavelli's suggestion that leaders should be like gods was deliberately intended to provoke outrage in his readers.)

The prince must none the less make himself feared in such a way that, if he is not loved, at least he escapes being hated. For fear is quite compatible with an absence of hatred; and the prince can always avoid hatred if he abstains from the property of his subjects and citizens and from their women.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54-55

Explanation and Analysis

Here Machiavelli clarifies his controversial argument that a leader must be both loved and feared. While it's more important for a leader to be feared than loved, Machiavelli argues, it's important for a leader to refrain from *complete* tyranny. A leader should ensure that he's feared, but he should never try to be hated. Leaders who are hated run the risk of stirring their people into rebellion. The combination of love and fear in a leader, on the other hand, is powerful because the people will never rebel against such a leader: love acts as a check against real hatred.

Many think of Machiavelli as advocating outright tyranny and total deviousness in leaders. Such an interpretation of *The Prince* is a caricature of Machiavelli's beliefs. Instead, Machiavelli argues that princes should try to engender *some* goodwill in their people (who, it should be noted, are all assumed to be men), if only to avoid outright rebellion.

But above all a prince must abstain from the property of others; because men sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli argues that princes must never steal their people's property. Property is the most sacred right of the people; therefore, to infringe upon it is a surefire way to provoke the people into rising up against their ruler.

Although Machiavelli is often interpreted as an opponent of democracy, the passage shows that Machiavelli has considerable respect for certain democratic values, even if his respect is purely pragmatic. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Machiavelli *doesn't* believe that a monarch has automatic ownership of his people's possessions. Rather, he acknowledges that the prince's power is greatly limited--a prince can't just seize his people's property at the drop of a hat. So even if Machiavelli is writing *The Prince* to ensure the supremacy of tyrants and dictators for years to come, his arguments presuppose a certain amount of respect for people's natural rights, reflecting the fledgling

democratic values in Italian society at the time. (The right to property would later form the core of the arguments of important political thinkers like Rousseau and John Locke, who openly criticized the kinds of rulers Machiavelli supported.)

Chapter 18 Quotes

So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he must learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion is defenseless against traps and a fox is defenseless against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 56-57

Explanation and Analysis

In one of the most famous passages in *The Prince*, Machiavelli argues that a good leader must be both clever and powerful. Throughout history, leaders have ruled because of the strength of their armies; other leaders have stayed in power because of their cleverness and wiliness. The ideal ruler, however, will use every resource at his disposal--i.e., he'll be both strong *and* clever.

The passage sums up the argument about war and force that Machiavelli has been making throughout his book. The ideal prince, we've seen, mustn't be afraid to use his army to crush his opponents. And yet too many princes are *too* quick to use their armies--they're too much like a lion and not enough like a fox. It's better for a ruler to be perpetually prepared to go to war, while using his charisma and "soft power" to prevent such a possibility.

So it follows that a prudent ruler cannot, and must not, honor his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Machiavelli argues that the best prince will not keep his word unnecessarily. Objectively, there is no rational reason for a prince to keep his word when doing so will weaken his position in the state. Therefore, a ruler *should* not keep his word--as always, he should prioritize power and control over honor and morality.

The passage reinforces Machiavelli's rejection of conventional morality. The average person would say that there is a clear reason to keep one's word: religious morals, or the intuitive rules of right and wrong, say that one should be honest and trustworthy. Machiavelli has no patience for such ideas--it's pointless for a prince to be honest, if his honesty endangers his position.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Princes cannot help arousing hatred in some quarters; so first they must strive not to be hated by all and every class of subject; and when this proves impossible, they should strive assiduously to escape the hated of the most powerful classes.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli warns Lorenzo of alienating the most powerful classes in society. As always, a prince should avoid the people's hatred, but if necessary, it's better for a prince to be hated by the lower classes than by the middle and upper classes.

The passage is interesting because it draws a clear distinction between the different strata of society. Early on, Machiavelli has drawn a rough distinction between a prince and his people. Here, though, Machiavelli's account of society is much more complicated: there are poor, weak people; wealthy, somewhat powerful people; and one wealthy, powerful prince presiding over everything.

The passage reflects the rise of the middle classes in Italian society in the centuries leading up to Machiavelli's life. Middle-class people in Italy enjoyed an unusual amount of independence and economic clout--indeed, some middle-class people eventually rose to become rulers (including Lorenzo's family, the Medicis!). In short, Machiavelli recognizes that all commoners aren't created equal--some are more powerful, and therefore more dangerous, than

others. So it's always best to have the middle and upper classes on your side, even if it means sacrificing the loyalty of the lower classes.

Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ A prince must, therefore, never lack advice. But he must take it when he wants to, not when others want him to. . . . a prince who is not himself wise cannot be well advised.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Machiavelli argues here that the best prince will have a good assembly of advisors at all times. Advisors are important because they can help the prince decide what to do in times of crisis; they can use their experience and expertise to ensure military victories and quell potential rebellions.

The danger of having advisors, of course, is that the advisors can become more powerful than the prince himself. Machiavelli fully recognizes such a possibility—that's why it's so important for a prince to be wise himself. A wise prince will make it clear that he is the "decider" and his advisors are just that—advisors. And yet the passage also brings up an interesting question—what's the relationship between Machiavelli and Lorenzo; i.e., isn't Machiavelli just an advisor, offering advice that Lorenzo is free to accept or ignore? Perhaps Machiavelli sees himself as the ultimate advisor—someone who teaches Lorenzo how to be wise, in order that Lorenzo will never be truly dependent on advisors again.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ So as not to rule out our free will, I believe that it is probably true that fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves.

Related Characters: Niccolò Machiavelli (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Machiavelli spells out his model of the universe: a universe in which humans have some control of their own destinies, though much of their lives remains controlled by "fortune." The passage is important because it situates Machiavelli in the rise of humanism during the European Renaissance. During the Middle Ages, philosophers thought of people's lives being almost entirely controlled by fortune (i.e., God). During the Renaissance, however, thinkers began to argue that humans, with their capacity for free will and free thought, could often control their own destinies. So even though the passage might seem restrictive in its account of human freedom (at least by modern standards), it was actually progressive for its time: it acknowledges that humans have the agency to accomplish their goals, instead of relying on an all-powerful God to give them what they want. (Machiavelli's belief in human freedom is a basic premise of his book, and of his belief in political science: it's precisely because humans have the freedom to control their own destinies that they're capable of controlling other people.)

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Addressing Lorenzo dé Medici, Machiavelli begins, "Men who are anxious to win the favor of a Prince nearly always follow the custom of presenting themselves to him with the possessions they value most." Eager to follow this custom by offering Lorenzo "some token of my devotion to you," Machiavelli thus dedicates this "little book" to the Florentine ruler. Machiavelli explains that the treatise comprises his most valued possession: the understanding of "great men" that he has gained through "long acquaintance with contemporary affairs and a continuous study of **the ancient world**." The work is a summary and analysis of Machiavelli's hard-won wisdom.

Machiavelli presents himself as a humble yet educated figure, offering Lorenzo a "little gift" that contains great wisdom. Machiavelli establishes the relationship between himself and Lorenzo, taking a deferential tone in his effort to "win the favor" of the new ruler. Despite his humble statements, Machiavelli also seeks here to prove his considerable prowess and skill, citing his knowledge of both antiquity and current affairs.

Machiavelli implores Lorenzo to accept his "unworthy" book, stating that the work is a humble but extremely "valuable gift." Machiavelli explains that he has "not embellished or crammed" this book with "big, impressive words" or flowery language. Rather, the work's value comes from "the variety of its contents and the seriousness of its subject-matter." Machiavelli asks Lorenzo to excuse the fact that he, a man "of low and humble status," has dared to write a manual for princes. He defends his endeavor with a metaphor, describing the way in which artists paint mountains from the vantage point of the lowlands, and vice versa. Similarly, "To comprehend fully the nature of the people, one must be a prince, and to comprehend fully the nature of princes one must be an ordinary citizen."

Once again Machiavelli paradoxically describes his work as an "unworthy" but "valuable" offering. Machiavelli's modest statements are intended as a traditional show of humility and respect before the powerful Medici ruler. Machiavelli endeavors to prove that his book is not a product of arrogance, but rather a symbol of loyalty to the new prince. With his artistic metaphor, Machiavelli highlights the mutual dependence that ties the elite ruling class and the masses together.

Machiavelli closes his introductory letter by asking Lorenzo to accept his gift and to ponder its lessons "diligently." In that way, Lorenzo may achieve the greatness that "fortune and your other qualities promise you." Asking Lorenzo to look down from his "lofty peak" to consider the "low-lying regions," Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to recognize the extent to which the unlucky Machiavelli has "undeservedly" suffered "the great and unremitting malice of fortune."

Machiavelli encourages Lorenzo to use the book to enhance his prowess, which in turn (as Machiavelli sees it) will prepare Lorenzo to take advantage of the opportunities provided by fortune. Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to take notice of the troubled masses, including Machiavelli. Machiavelli insists that misfortune, not disloyalty, led to his recent fall from grace.

CHAPTER 1

Machiavelli explains that all states are either republics or principalities. Among principalities, there are hereditary states, in which the prince's family have been "long established as rulers," and new principalities, which are acquired by previously unknown rulers. Some new principalities are "completely new," as was the case with Francesco Sforza, who rose from private citizen to Duke of Milan. Others are only partly new and are appended to existing states "like limbs," as was the case when the king of Spain acquired the kingdom of Naples.

Machiavelli straightforwardly sets up the subject matter of the book, beginning with the distinction between established, new, and partially new states. With his mention of Francesco Sforza, Machiavelli highlights a contemporary ruler who blurred the line between the masses and the elite, rising from citizen to prince.

Among the types of new principalities, there are those states that are accustomed to governance under a sovereign prince and those that are "used to freedom." A prince may gain his position in a new principality either with his own arms or with foreign military support. Finally, the ruler of a new principality wins his state "either by fortune or by prowess."

Machiavelli points out the importance of arms when seeking control of a new principality. Additionally, Machiavelli lays out the critical distinction between rulers who gain status through fortune or prowess.

CHAPTER 2

Machiavelli states that he will "leave out any discussion of republics" in *The Prince*, having already written about republics in other works. Machiavelli introduces his intention to focus solely on principalities and the varying ways in which they "can be governed and maintained." Beginning with hereditary states, he explains that they are much more easily maintained than new principalities, since the prince's family and institutions have already been established. Machiavelli urges established princes to maintain existing institutions and "then to adapt policy to events." This will allow a ruler to secure his position, unless "some extraordinary" force (i.e., fortune) deprives him of his state. Nonetheless, "if so deprived" by fortune, a hereditary ruler may easily reconquer his state "whenever the usurper suffers a setback."

Machiavelli further defines the scope of the book, limiting it to principalities and their absolute rulers. With regard to hereditary states, Machiavelli encourages rulers to approach governance with a combination of tradition and adaptation. While Machiavelli urges hereditary princes to build on the strong institutional foundations that make their states so secure, he also advises them to "adapt policy" to the times. Skilled rulers should seek a middle ground between tradition and change, drawing on each as necessity demands.

Employing a contemporary Italian example, Machiavelli argues that the "natural" or hereditary prince "has less reason and less need to give offense" to his people because of his family's long-standing rule. Thus, "It follows that he should be more loved" by his subjects. As long as the hereditary prince does not "provoke hatred" through "extraordinary vices," he should maintain his subjects' goodwill. Due to the "persistence" of a hereditary principality's rule, people forget the "memories of innovation" and become accustomed to the status quo, making it easier for a ruler to maintain power.

Machiavelli raises the importance of earning the people's goodwill when securing one's rule. He establishes the distinction between a populace's goodwill or hatred for its ruler, highlighting the people's unique ability to crown or dethrone princes. Machiavelli calls attention to this princely vulnerability, urging rulers to avoid vices that enrage their subjects and thus threaten their position.

CHAPTER 3

Unlike hereditary principalities, new principalities present considerable difficulties for rulers. Machiavelli discusses composite principalities, which are "not entirely new but a new appendage to an old state." In composite states disorders arise due to "one natural difficulty": when people revolt and welcome a new ruler in the hopes of improving their situation, they often belatedly realize "that they have made matters worse." This is because a wise prince "is always compelled to injure those who have made him the new ruler" in order to secure his control. Although a prince "needs the goodwill of the inhabitants" to enter a state, it becomes impossible to maintain the people's "friendship" following a conquest. Machiavelli illustrates this principle with the contemporary example of Louis XII's conquest and subsequent loss of Milan.

Discussing composite principalities, Machiavelli displays the brand of pragmatic ruthlessness that characterizes much of his book. Machiavelli again emphasizes the importance of gaining the people's goodwill, although he cautions that it will be impossible to maintain allies' "friendship" after a conquest. With this advice, Machiavelli highlights the fragile balance of power between a ruler and his subjects, urging princes to take the necessary steps to maintain the balance in their own favor.

Machiavelli adds, "When lands that have rebelled are reconquered they are not lost so easily," because a ruler takes advantage of the revolt by harshly punishing offenders and strengthening his state. Returning to the example of Milan, Machiavelli explains that the occupying French easily lost their conquest to the deposed duke, Ludovico, when he waged an initial war of reconquest. However, when France lost Milan after a second campaign, the "whole world" had to oppose her and various foes conspired against her. France lost Milan on both occasions.

Machiavelli pragmatically encourages rulers to use revolts in their favor, counseling them to take advantage of the opportunity to reassert their power and, if necessary, to reorganize their states. Machiavelli advises rulers to adopt harsh measures as necessary to secure their control over their subjects. The skillful use of arms and punishment forms an important component of governance.

Composite principalities are more easily maintained when the conquering and conquered states share the same country or language. Machiavelli writes that people typically "live quietly" as long as their "old ways of life are undisturbed." To maintain his new acquisitions in this instance, a ruler need only destroy the family of the old prince and refrain from altering the people's laws and taxes. In this way, the conquering state will easily absorb the new possessions.

Focusing on a unique kind of composite state, Machiavelli advises leniency when annexing similar territories. By refraining from altering laws and taxes, rulers will generally avoid negatively impacting subjects' lives and will thus earn their friendship (or at least avoid their hatred). On the other hand, deposed rulers must be dealt with much more swiftly and harshly.

However, when states with differing languages, customs, and institutions are acquired, the ruler's task becomes more difficult. In this case, both fortune and prowess must aid the ruler. In these instances, Machiavelli advises rulers to either live in the conquered state or establish settlements there. By living in the new state, a ruler "can detect trouble at the start and deal with it immediately." Settlements have the advantage of "little or no personal expense" and displace only a small minority of native inhabitants. Machiavelli advises rulers to avoid garrisoning large armies in new states, since the expenses are greater and the troops provoke hatred.

Machiavelli highlights the shared importance of fortune and prowess when securing certain types of composite principalities. In some instances, fortune and a ruler's prowess must work in concert to establish his position. Machiavelli urges princes to avoid stationing armies in new states, an action that alienates huge swathes of a conquered population. Rulers must sometimes opt for statecraft and settlements over shows of armed aggression.

Additionally, rulers in countries that differ from their own should endeavor to protect "smaller neighboring powers" and to weaken powerful ones. With this method, a ruler can protect himself against the threat of invasion. Machiavelli references the Romans, who grew their empire by conspiring with disgruntled natives in neighboring states. Machiavelli also cites the Romans' successful strategy in Greece, which entailed curbing the power of competing Greek states. Machiavelli praises the Romans for their "foresight," which allowed them to sense trouble well in advance and to remedy it before it became too widespread. Machiavelli compares political disorders to a "**wasting disease**," which at the start is "easy to cure but difficult to diagnose" and, if untreated, becomes "easy to diagnose but difficult to cure." The Romans never allowed problems "to go unchecked" to avoid a war, knowing that war "can only be postponed to the advantage" of opponents.

Using the metaphor of a "wasting disease," Machiavelli applauds those rare rulers who possess the prowess necessary to diagnose and cure the problems of their states. With these statements Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of prowess in a ruler. Machiavelli praises the ancient Romans' ability to secure and strengthen their holdings through the foresight of their rulers, who used a combination of armed force and cunning diplomacy to maintain the empire. Machiavelli advises princes to attack problems in a head-on manner—which often means launching physical attacks on opponents.

Machiavelli returns to his earlier discussion of Louis XII, analyzing the mistakes that he made during his Italian campaigns. Louis came into Italy at the behest of the Venetians, who wanted an ally in their campaign against Lombardy. When Louis conquered Lombardy, he suddenly found himself surrounded by many allies, having gained the friendship of the Genoese, the Florentines, and other small states. However, Louis made the fatal mistake of allying himself with the more powerful Pope Alexander, thereby alienating his smaller allies and weakening himself. Having made this first mistake, Louis was "forced to make others," eventually losing his foothold in Italy. Machiavelli demonstrates that Louis failed to follow the protocol for rulers of composite states. From this example he declares a general rule: "That whoever is responsible for another's becoming powerful ruins himself."

In both diplomacy and warfare, Machiavelli counsels rulers to focus first and foremost on the security and strength of their own position. Rulers must act only in a way that simultaneously fortifies their own power and weakens the influence of others. This task involves a combination of prowess and fortune, which Machiavelli implies that Louis XII lacked. According to Machiavelli, the weakness of the small Italian states and their necessary dependence on France would have made them much more useful allies to Louis than the already independent and power-hungry papal state.

CHAPTER 4

Machiavelli turns to the ancient empire of Alexander the Great, addressing how it was that Alexander's successors "ruled securely" after Alexander died "with his conquest scarcely completed." How was a "general uprising" averted in the newly formed composite principality? Machiavelli states that all principalities are ruled in one of two ways, either by a prince and his ministers or by a prince and by nobles. While ministers are subservient to the prince and do not have subjects of their own, nobles derive power from their "ancient lineage" and inspire the love of their subjects. Thus in a state governed by a prince and his appointed ministers, as was the case with Alexander's empire, the ruler holds "greater authority."

Distinguishing between states ruled by a prince and his ministers versus those ruled by a prince and nobles, Machiavelli describes the independence that nobles derive from their hereditary status. According to Machiavelli, nobles pose a greater threat to sovereign rulers than ministers because they rely less on the benevolence and favor of a ruler. Nobles, supported by the goodwill of their own subjects, can undermine a prince's status and security.

Machiavelli employs contemporary examples to illustrate the distinctions between the two types of principalities. The Turkish empire is ruled by one prince and his ministers, who are "all slaves bound in loyalty to their master." Since these ministers derive their positions from the prince, they are more loyal to him and less likely to be corrupted and bribed by foreign powers. Therefore, it is "difficult to win control of the Turkish empire but, once …. conquered, it can be held with ease." Conversely, a king and a "long-established order of nobles," which derive their status from birth and possess their own subjects, rule France. Nobles are not dependent on the king for their position; thus, foreign foes can easily find and bribe disgruntled and disloyal nobles. Therefore, France "can be more easily seized" but can be held "only with great difficulty," because there remain nobles "to raise insurrections."

Machiavelli elaborates on his argument, describing the way in which nobles, working with foreign foes, can pose both internal and external threats to a prince's position and state. Machiavelli contrasts the two types of government, highlighting their inverse advantages and disadvantages. While disloyal nobles can aid aspiring conquerors, Machiavelli urges established rulers to be wary of these inconstant nobles, who will not hesitate to turn on former friends when it benefits their own interests.

According to Machiavelli, Alexander conquered Darius's state, which resembled the Turkish empire, by defeating Darius on the battlefield. With Darius dead, Alexander had secured the state with difficulty but consequently held it with ease. On the other hand, the Romans, who conquered states that resembled France, won their possessions easily but encountered great difficulties in securing their control. Machiavelli concludes by stating that "this contrast" does not depend as much on the prowess of the conquerors as on "the kind of state they conquer."

Discussing the inverse advantages and disadvantages of the two states, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of fortune in determining the course of warfare and politics. In certain situations fortune plays a larger role in deciding the outcome of events than the prowess of individual rulers. Machiavelli highlights the ways in which the two forces may work independently or in tandem.


CHAPTER 5

With newly acquired states that "have been accustomed to living freely under their own laws," Machiavelli lists three ways to secure control. Firstly, a prince can destroy the state. Secondly, a prince can live there in person. Finally, a prince can allow the people to maintain their laws and establish an oligarchy to ensure that the state remains loyal to him. States that are accustomed to freedom, such as republics, can be easily ruled by their own citizens. However, Machiavelli cautions, "There is no surer way of keeping possession than by devastation." Citing Ancient Greek and Roman examples, Machiavelli warns that if the conqueror of a republic chooses not to destroy it, then he "may expect to be destroyed himself." Regardless of the passage of time and "the benefits received from the new ruler," republics remember their former freedom and thus are prone to rebellion.

Machiavelli assumes a ruthlessly pragmatic tone when discussing the governance of newly acquired republics and other formerly free states. Machiavelli advocates "devastation" as the surest means of securing these rebellion-prone states. In this instance Machiavelli advises strict and severe rule over the rebellious masses, which, regardless of the ruler's behavior and the passage of time, will never accept the new prince. Because the citizens of former republics cannot be won over, Machiavelli counsels a proactive course of harsh rule and punishment that will save princes' from their own ruin.


By contrast, acquired principalities are much easier to govern because, having lost their former prince and being unaccustomed to freedom, their people are more likely to obey the new prince. Within conquered republics there is "more life, more hatred, [and] a greater desire for revenge." Therefore, Machiavelli concludes that the "surest way" to secure control of conquered republics is "to wipe them out or live there in person."

The citizens of acquired republics resent the loss of their civic freedoms and therefore despise their conqueror. The "surest way" for a new prince to combat the people's unremitting hatred is through destruction. When surrounded by vengeful masses, pragmatic rulers must govern with an iron fist.

CHAPTER 6

Machiavelli encourages prudent rulers to "follow in the footsteps of great men" and to strive to emulate their prowess. Like an archer, by aiming high they can hope to "reach the target." In states that are "completely new" and where the prince is also a "newcomer," the difficulties he faces are "more or less serious insofar as he is more or less able." Machiavelli states that the less a prince has relied on fortune to gain his position, the stronger the foundations of his rule. Machiavelli turns his focus to rulers who have "acquired and founded kingdoms," such as Cyrus and Romulus. For these rulers, fortune provided only the opportunity for "these men to succeed;" their prowess allowed them to take advantage of these opportunities and build prosperous states.

Machiavelli highlights the particular importance of a ruler's prowess in deciding the fate of a new principality. Machiavelli urges rulers to build their conquests on their own abilities, which provides a stronger foundation than unpredictable fortune. Nonetheless, Machiavelli concedes that the two forces must work in tandem, with fortune providing the opportunity for skilled men "to succeed." Additionally, Machiavelli draws attention to ancient examples, which illustrates his own learning and skill.

New princes who win their principalities with prowess acquire their positions with difficulty but maintain them easily. The primary difficulty that they face involves the establishment of a new state, complete with "new institutions and laws." Machiavelli writes, "There is nothing more difficult to handle, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous .... than initiating changes in a state's constitution." Machiavelli encourages innovators "to stand alone" and "depend on their own resources," although he warns that the "populace is by nature fickle" and difficult to persuade. He urges princes to arm themselves so that they can use force to convince the people if rhetoric fails. Citing Hiero of Syracuse, Cyrus, and Romulus, Machiavelli implores new rulers to secure their institutions using the threat of armed force.

Machiavelli explores the balance between laws and arms, analyzing the intersection of statecraft and armed force. He encourages new princes to support the "dangerous" work of state building with the threat of force, which can be used effectively to control the masses when words fail. Additionally, Machiavelli urges new rulers to draw on their political and military prowess when securing their positions, again cautioning that fortune – like the masses – is "fickle" and unpredictable. Rulers should avoid—as much as possible—leaving matters of politics and warfare to chance.

CHAPTER 7

Machiavelli turns to a discussion of princes who gain their position through fortune. Unlike those who come to power by prowess, new princes who come to power by fortune "do so with little exertion" but can maintain their status only with considerable effort. Machiavelli cautions his audience that those who gain power by fortune "rely on the goodwill and fortune" of others, which makes their position vulnerable and unstable. New princes who come to power by fortune can only succeed if they possess "such prowess that overnight they can learn how to preserve what fortune has suddenly tossed into their laps." Like other princes, they must lay strong foundations for their rule.

Although both fortune and the goodwill of the people can aid a prince in his effort to gain and secure his state, Machiavelli cautions that a prince must not rely exclusively on luck and the friendship of others in the long term. Rulers who come to power by fortune can only expect their good luck to last for a short time and therefore must possess the skill needed to manage a principality. Once again, fortune and prowess must work in tandem to lay the foundation for a strong and lasting state.

Machiavelli introduces the examples of two contemporary rulers, one who came to power by prowess and the other by fortune. Francesco Sforza used his prowess to rise from a private citizen to the duke of Milan. He won his status with great effort but held it with "little exertion." On the other hand, Cesare Borgia gained his position easily through "the good fortune of his father," Pope Alexander VI, but lost his state when that fortune "disappeared." Machiavelli praises Borgia for the "strong foundations" that he established after gaining his state through fortune. However, Machiavelli recognizes the "inordinate malice of fortune" that eventually destroyed Borgia's gains, although he argues that Borgia was not to blame for this loss.

Again referencing the "malice of fortune," Machiavelli reflects on the extremely bad luck that unjustly led to both Borgia's and his own loss of political power and influence. As was the case with Borgia, even a capable ruler who lays "strong foundations" for his position is not immune to bad luck and other unpredictable changes in fortune. Additionally, Machiavelli's discussion of Sforza highlights the transformation of a citizen into a prince, complicating the typical balance of power between the masses and the elite ruling classes.

Machiavelli retells the story of Cesare Borgia for instructional purposes. He begins with Pope Alexander VI, who encountered considerable challenges when he attempted to acquire a state for his illegitimate son. Unable to obtain a state through negotiation, Alexander instead created disorder within Italy, throwing states "into a turmoil" so that he could then "win secure control of part of them." Alexander allowed the Venetians to invite France into Italy and later allied himself directly with France, which aided his initial conquests. With these first possessions, Borgia consolidated control by undermining the power of the Roman barons and fiercely crushing rebellions in Urbino and the Romagna (region of north-central Italy). Borgia came to distrust the foreign French arms that had initially aided him and gradually swore them off in favor of "stratagem." Borgia secured his rule by winning the "trust and friendship" of his subjects and creating his own troops.

Machiavelli praises Borgia for his skillful use of both laws and arms, citing the various ways in which Borgia used physical force and "stratagem" to secure his conquests. As a diplomat in early fifteenth-century Florence, Machiavelli observed Borgia's tactics firsthand and his admiration for Borgia's skill in warfare and statecraft infuses this description. Machiavelli also praises Borgia's father, Pope Alexander VI, for his ability to cunningly incite and take advantage of disorder within Italy. Finally, Machiavelli discusses the way in which Borgia won the goodwill and "trust" of his subjects by giving them the privilege to serve in his army. By giving the people this power, Borgia secured their loyalty.

Discussing the Romagna at length, Machiavelli describes the situation that Borgia inherited when he conquered it. The Romagna had been ruled poorly and was rife with "factions" and "anarchy." Therefore, when Borgia established his government there, he entrusted "the fullest powers" to his "cruel, efficient" subordinate, Remirro de Orco, in order to subdue the province. With "excessive authority" Remirro "pacified and unified" the Romagna in a short time. However, knowing that the "severities" of Remirro's rule had earned Borgia "a certain amount of hatred," Borgia publicly criticized the "harsh nature of his minister" and eventually had him executed. This action kept the people "at once appeased and stupefied."

Machiavelli admires the cunning way in which Borgia subdued the Romagna and overcame the hatred of its people. By placing his subordinate in charge of harshly pacifying the province, Borgia distanced himself from the cruelties and violence that defined Remirro's rule. However, by publicly executing Remirro after his methods inspired hatred for Borgia's government, Borgia removed the people's oppressor and thereby earned their friendship. With this mixture of cruelty and appeasement, Borgia secured the Romagna.

Machiavelli returns to Borgia's saga. With his power fairly consolidated, Borgia began to consider further expansion. Knowing that he had "to go carefully" regarding his damaged relationship with France, Borgia sought new alliances, particularly with France's opponent, Spain. Borgia aimed to secure his position so that even if his father's successor as pope proved unfriendly, he might still maintain his gains. However, with Pope Alexander's sudden death, Borgia was unable to win Spanish support and could not secure his position. Prior to his father's death, Borgia had secured his power in three of four ways: he had destroyed the families of deposed rulers; he had won over the Roman barons; and he had gained a "very large following" in the College of Cardinals, which elects new popes. However, Borgia failed to acquire enough power and prestige prior to his father's death in order to be able to "withstand an initial attack."

Machiavelli discusses the misfortune that befell Borgia and ultimately led to the loss of his conquests. With his father's ill-timed death, Borgia was unable to finish laying the strong foundations for his state that would have secured his rule against all threats. Although Borgia possessed the prowess to secure his state in three ways, misfortune robbed him of the opportunity to secure his state in the fourth and final way. Borgia used a combination of statecraft, diplomacy, and warfare to maintain his position, although he lacked the necessary power and prestige to "withstand an initial attack" from his many foreign and domestic opponents. Borgia won and lost his state by fortune.

Thus, with Pope Alexander VI's unexpected death, Cesare Borgia found himself "with his state in the Romagna consolidated but with everything else in the air," having not yet secured additional territories or the friendship of Spain. "Mortally ill" himself, Borgia was caught "between two extremely powerful and hostile armies," the French and the Spanish. Machiavelli argues that Borgia was a ruler of "such ferocity and prowess" that if he had been in good health when his father died, or if he had not had two armies "bearing down on him," he would have "overcome every difficulty." With these unfortunate circumstances in mind, Machiavelli writes that he cannot "censure" Borgia. Machiavelli holds up Borgia as an exemplary contemporary example for new princes, praising his diplomatic skill and his ability to be both "loved and feared by his subjects."

Like himself, Machiavelli portrays Borgia as a victim of fortune. Despite his considerable prowess, Borgia was unable to overcome the great misfortune that befell him. With Borgia's cautionary tale, Machiavelli illustrates the unrelenting nature of fortune, which can dethrone even the most skilled ruler. According to Machiavelli, a series of unfortunate and coinciding events – ranging from Borgia's poor health to foreign foes – conspired to produce Borgia's downfall. Nonetheless, Machiavelli praises Borgia's prowess, citing his ability to secure the people's loyalty through both love and fear.

Machiavelli's only criticism of Cesare Borgia stems from his choice of pope, Julius II (also known as San Pietro ad Vincula). Machiavelli argues that Borgia should have used his influence to keep the papacy from going to one of his enemies, a man whom Borgia had harmed in the past. Borgia should have attempted to secure the election of a Spanish cardinal, since Borgia and his father were Spanish themselves. According to Machiavelli, Julius II's election spelled the "ultimate ruin" for Borgia.

Machiavelli points out a critical weakness in Borgia's attempts to lay a strong foundation for his position. By allowing a man who hated him to become pope, Borgia essentially ensured his own fall from grace. Losing the goodwill of the pope and the papal state, Borgia forfeited a crucial ally in his attempts to secure and expand his state.

CHAPTER 8

Machiavelli highlights two ways of becoming a prince that "cannot altogether be attributed to fortune or to prowess." The first way is when "a man becomes prince by some criminal and nefarious method." The second manner is when "a private citizen becomes prince of his native city with the approval of his fellow citizens," as often happens in a democratic state. Focusing on the first method, Machiavelli states his intention to explore two examples, one ancient and one modern, "without otherwise discussing the rights and wrongs" of this method.

Machiavelli firmly separates morality from his discussion of men who win their states through "criminal" methods. Machiavelli refrains from ethical judgment of these princes, focusing instead on the advantages and disadvantages of their harsh tactics. Significantly, Machiavelli draws a distinction between these "criminal" methods and prowess.

Machiavelli introduces the ancient example of Agathocles, who rose from the "lowest, most abject condition of life" to become king of Syracuse (in Sicily). "At every stage of his career" Agathocles "behaved like a criminal," also possessing considerable "audacity and physical courage." Rising through the military ranks to become praetor of Syracuse, Agathocles decided to make himself prince. Assembling the Senate of Syracuse, Agathocles had his soldiers massacre the senators and richest citizens and seized the government of Syracuse. Machiavelli argues that Agathocles' success cannot be attributed to fortune, since his rise was marked by "countless difficulties." Similarly, his success cannot be attributed to prowess, since "it cannot be called prowess to kill fellow-citizens, to betray friends, [and] to be treacherous, pitiless, [and] irreligious." With his "brutal cruelty," Agathocles won power but not honor, and therefore he cannot be "honored among eminent men."

Although Machiavelli acknowledges Agathocles' "audacity and physical courage," he does not attribute Agathocles' rise to prowess, a term that Machiavelli reserves for rulers who win their states with a certain degree of honor. Recognizing the effectiveness of Agathocles' methods, Machiavelli nonetheless states that Agathocles cannot be "honored" with other able rulers. Machiavelli's refusal to attribute Agathocles' success to prowess functions as a sort of implicit criticism of his "treacherous" methods. Interestingly, this implicit criticism contradicts Machiavelli's earlier attempts to remove morality from the discussion of criminal tactics, though it may fit with Machiavelli's belief that a ruler cannot succeed by inspiring hate in those whom he hopes to lead.

Turning to the modern example, Machiavelli introduces Oliverotto of Fermo. Raised by his uncle Fogliani, a leading citizen of Fermo, Oliverotto was sent to serve as a soldier in his youth. Trained as a soldier and believing that "it was servile to take orders from others," Oliverotto hatched a plan to return to Fermo and seize it for himself. Returning to his childhood home, Oliverotto prepared a "formal banquet" to which he invited his uncle and other leading citizens. During the banquet, Oliverotto's soldiers "appeared from hidden recesses" and killed Fogliani and all the other guests. With his opponents eliminated, Oliverotto "strengthened his position" further by creating "new civil and military institutions." A year later, Cesare Borgia and his troops trapped Oliverotto and his troops, eventually capturing and killing Oliverotto.

Although Machiavelli does not praise the treacherous Oliverotto, he does reference the skillful way in which Oliverotto "strengthened his position" by establishing new legal and military institutions. By creating and staffing new institutions, Oliverotto fortified his new standing by ensuring that his recently installed ministers and military commanders remained loyal to and dependent on him. Like Agathocles, Oliverotto's methods were criminal but quite successful. Stopping short of praise, Machiavelli does recognize Oliverotto's cunning ability to remove his opponents.

Machiavelli considers how it was that Agathocles and others like him were able to "live securely" in their own country after committing "countless treacheries and cruelties." Machiavelli argues that it is "a question of cruelty used well or badly." Cruelty is used well when "it is employed once for all, and one's safety depends on it, and then it is not persisted in." Cruelty is used badly when it "grows in intensity" and causes a prince's subjects to "never feel secure" with regard to their ruler. Machiavelli advises rulers to inflict violence "once for all" so that people will then "forget what it tastes like and so be less resentful." Violence must be inflicted once, but by contrast benefits to one's subjects must be doled out gradually and "in that way they will taste better."

With these closing remarks, Machiavelli blurs the typical distinction between virtue and vice by arguing that cruelty can be used both well and badly. Machiavelli advises rulers to employ cruelty wisely to manage their relationship with their subjects. Violence used poorly will only enrage the people and thus weaken a ruler's position. However, cruelty used well forms the cornerstone of a prudent prince's safety and security, allowing him to strengthen his position and his state. When used sparingly by a wise prince, cruelty can be a virtue.

CHAPTER 9

Machiavelli discusses the second way in which rulers may gain power without the aid of fortune or prowess. In a constitutional principality, a ruler gains power through "the favor of his fellow citizens" and does not require prowess or fortune alone, but rather a "lucky astuteness." Within a constitutional state, one becomes a prince either with the help of the people or the nobles. The people and the nobles always stand in opposition to one another, since the nobles want to "dominate and oppress" the people and the people want to avoid such subjugation. The result of these "opposed ambitions" may be a principality, a free state, or anarchy.

Machiavelli separates fortune and prowess from the work of gaining "the favor" of one's fellow citizens, which he attributes to a "lucky astuteness." Nonetheless, this term calls to mind a sort of synthesis of fortune and prowess, hinting at the union of opportunity and skill. Machiavelli discusses the animosity between the masses and the nobles, describing the way in which a ruler may find himself caught between these forces' "opposing ambitions."

According to Machiavelli, when the nobles see that they "cannot withstand the people," they work to "increase the standing" of one of their own in order to pursue their aims through him. When threatened, the people act similarly, trying to make a private citizen into a prince so that they may seek protection behind his authority. Machiavelli writes, "A man who becomes prince with the help of the nobles finds it more difficult to maintain his position than one who does so with the help of the people." When a prince gains power with the nobles, "he finds himself surrounded by many who believe they are his equals" and who are less willing to take orders from him. The nobles are also less honest in their intentions than the people, since the people want only to avoid oppression.

Machiavelli outlines the risks involved when a prince gains power with the help of the nobles. With power and influence that derive from their own standing, nobles act fairly independently and pose a greater threat to a prince. On the other hand, the people want only to avoid hardship and rarely harbor princely aspirations. Therefore, the people make a less threatening – and thus more favorable – ally for a prince. According to Machiavelli, both the people and the nobles will attempt to use princes to their own advantage. Thus, a prince must avoid being caught helplessly in the crossfire.

Machiavelli lists "two main considerations" with regard to the nobles: they are either dependent on a prince's fortune, or they are not. Machiavelli encourages rulers to reward those who become dependent and "are not rapacious." Those nobles who remain independent do so for two different reasons: they are cowardly and "lacking in spirit," or they remain independent "for reasons of ambition." With the former, Machiavelli says to "make use of them," and therefore a ruler need not fear them "in times of adversity." With the latter, Machiavelli advises princes to guard themselves and to treat these nobles as if they were sworn enemies, since they will attempt to ruin their ruler in times of adversity.

Machiavelli encourages rulers to secure their positions by attempting to make the nobles dependent on their benevolence. According to Machiavelli, nobles who rely on a prince for their status and wellbeing are less likely to conspire against him. However, a ruler must fortify himself against ambitious and power-hungry nobles, who will attempt to exploit any weakness of their prince. A ruler must guard himself against such nobles both in times of peace and adversity.

When a ruler gains his position with the favor of the people, he "must work to retain their friendship." Machiavelli argues that this is simple because "the people ask only not to be oppressed." However, a prince who gains power with the favor of the nobles but against the will of the people should first and foremost attempt to "win the people over." If he takes the people under his protection, then this too is simple. When people receive favors from a ruler they originally opposed, they find themselves "under a great[er] obligation to their benefactor" than if they had initially supported him. Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of maintaining the people's friendship, since without it a ruler "has no remedy in times of adversity."

Although Machiavelli emphasizes the ease with which a ruler may gain and retain the friendship of the people, he places the utmost importance on this simple task. The goodwill of the people fortifies a prince's rule and attains particular significance in difficult times. Popular support forms a necessary component of a prince's rule and in return the people ask for protection and fairness from "their benefactor." This mutual dependence allows both parties to achieve their ends and live in harmony.

Machiavelli warns princes that they cannot rely on what they have "experienced in times of tranquility" when they find themselves at war. In times of adversity, "when the state has need of its citizens," they are very few that come to its aid. Because of this, Machiavelli states, "A wise prince must devise ways by which his citizens are always and in all circumstances dependent on him and on his authority." If the people remain dependent on their prince, then they "will always be faithful to him."

A prince must establish the people's dependence on his rule, since dependence breeds loyalty. Dependent citizens will loyally defend their prince because they fear the arrival of an unknown usurper, who may not treat them as favorably as the current prince. This principle highlights the symbiotic relationship between the people and their prince.

CHAPTER 10

Machiavelli discusses a manner in which the strength of a principality may be measured. Machiavelli draws a distinction between princes who possess territory and resources such that they can "stand alone" and those who "must always have recourse to the protection of others." Machiavelli defines the latter group of princes as those who "cannot take the field against the enemy but are forced to retreat behind walls and make their defense there." In this case, Machiavelli advises these princes to fortify their towns and "not to worry" about the surrounding countryside. If a prince has fortified his towns well, then enemies will think twice before launching an attack against him. Machiavelli states, "It is obviously not easy to assault a town which has been made into a bastion by a prince who is not hated by the people."

Machiavelli describes two powerful ways in which a prince may secure his status and his state: through the use of arms and fortifications and through the goodwill of the people. Princes who possess both physical defenses and popular support protect themselves with highly effective and complementary means and thus make unappealing targets for foreign aggressors. With walls and forts a prince wards off external threats; with the support of his subjects a prince guards himself against internal disorder and opposition.

Citing the modern examples of independent German cities, Machiavelli writes, "A prince who has a well-fortified city and does not make himself hated is secure against attack." Because the German cities are protected with moats, walls, and "public stocks of drink, food, and fuel" for their people, would-be attackers avoid these cities, knowing that any siege would be "protracted" and difficult. If a siege does in fact occur, Machiavelli argues that a "powerful, courageous prince" will always overcome the ensuing difficulties, inspiring his subjects with hope and spreading "fear of the enemy's cruelty." Machiavelli even states that the burning and pillaging of the countryside by an enemy may unite the people and prince in shared hatred of the attacker. In short, a prudent prince, with sufficient fortifications and provisions, may easily overcome a siege.

According to Machiavelli, a prince who finds himself under siege must draw on his prowess to unite the people in fear and hatred of the aggressor. A prince must work to direct the people's anger and frustration at the foreign foe and unite his state in hatred of a common enemy. The goodwill of the people serves as a central pillar of a prince's defense, although the prince must possess the prowess necessary to unify his people in difficult times. To overcome a siege, a prince requires the support of the people as much as he needs physical fortifications and supplies.

CHAPTER 11

Machiavelli segues into a discussion of ecclesiastical principalities, which are "won by prowess or by fortune but are kept without the help of either." These states are stewarded by "religious institutions," which possess such power that regardless of the current prince's behavior or abilities, the principality remains secure. Unlike all other states, ecclesiastical princes possess a state but do not defend it and have subjects but do not govern them. Ecclesiastical principalities are largely safe from rebellions and are the only totally "secure and happy" states. Additionally, ecclesiastical states are "sustained by higher powers." Since they are "maintained by God," Machiavelli says that he will refrain from the presumptuousness of trying to fully comprehend them. Nonetheless, Machiavelli embarks on an analysis of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church's "great temporal power," which it has attained since the papacy of Alexander VI.

Machiavelli describes the solid foundations on which ecclesiastical principalities rest, rendering them virtually indestructible. Rulers of these states have an unusual relationship with their states, which function independent of rulers' prowess or fortune, and with their subjects, whom they do not govern in the typical sense. Safe from popular rebellions, ecclesiastical states possess a unique type of security, which they derive from their foundation upon religion. Machiavelli refrains from serious criticism of ecclesiastical states, chief among them the Roman Catholic Church, likely owing to the power of the Church and its pope, who was believed to be infallible.

Before Charles VIII of France invaded Italy, the peninsula was ruled by several separate states: the pope, the Venetians, the king of Naples, the duke of Milan, and the Florentines. These states had "two main preoccupations": ensuring that no foreign ruler invaded Italy and maintaining the balance of power between themselves. Two factions of Roman barons, the Orsini and Colonna, had traditionally kept the papacy weak and its power in check. Because of the "brevity" of each pope's rule, no pope had been able to crush the power of both the Orsini and Colonna until the reign of Alexander VI. Using his son, Cesare Borgia, as "his instrument" and the invasion of France as his opportunity, Alexander VI waged war and greatly enhanced the earthly power of the Church.

Using the armies and conquests of his son, Pope Alexander VI greatly enhanced the earthly power of his ecclesiastical state. With a combination of diplomacy and warfare, Alexander used his considerable prowess to expand the papacy's dominion. Alexander employed laws and arms to break the internal power of Rome's factions and to overcome the Church's outside opponents. Under Alexander's stewardship, the Church became an aggressive state with power and influence that exceeded any single pope's reign.

Following Alexander VI's death and Cesare Borgia's subsequent loss of power, the Church inherited "the fruits" of the previous pope's conquests. Pope Julius II, finding the power of the Church greatly expanded, built on the foundations of his predecessor. Julius kept the Roman barons in check and continued the wars of conquest. Julius' successor, Pope Leo, now finds the Church and papacy "in an extremely strong position." Machiavelli expresses his hope that Leo will use his "goodness and countless other virtues" to make the Church "very great and revered."

Subsequent popes benefitted from the strong foundations laid by Alexander. Machiavelli implores Leo to use his prowess as steward of the Church. Machiavelli lauds Leo, a Medici relative of the man to whom his book is dedicated, Lorenzo. Seeking to convince Lorenzo of his loyalty to the Medici, Machiavelli lavishes praise and good wishes on this other powerful member of the family.

CHAPTER 12

Having laid out the characteristics of different principalities and having considered some of the varying reasons for their success or failure, Machiavelli turns to a discussion of the ways in which states can prepare themselves for attack or defense. Machiavelli again emphasizes that a prince must build on "sound foundations" or he will "come to grief." The main foundations of all states "are **good laws and good arms**." Because it is impossible to have good laws without good arms (military power), and because good laws inevitably follow from good arms, Machiavelli devotes his attention to military organization and does not discuss laws.

Although Machiavelli acknowledges the shared importance of laws and arms, he places a clear emphasis on the maintenance of good arms. While both good laws and good arms form the foundation of a stable state, Machiavelli advises princes to focus first and foremost on military organization, which will pave the way for legal and civic institutions. Rulers must prioritize military matters; therefore, Machiavelli focuses his discussion on good arms.

Among the different types of arms that a prince may use for his defense, there are his own troops, mercenary troops, auxiliary troops, and composite troops. Machiavelli explains that mercenary and auxiliary troops "are useless" and he encourages rulers to avoid employing them. Machiavelli states that mercenary troops are dangerous because "there is no loyalty or inducement to keep them on the field apart from the little they are paid . . . [which] is not enough to make them want to die for you." Machiavelli believes that mercenaries are more likely to desert and he blames "the present ruin of Italy" on its rulers' reliance on mercenary forces. When Charles VIII of France invaded and conquered Italy, he showed the Italians that their mercenaries are worthless and the Italians suffered the consequences for their misguided dependence on these forces.

With these statements, Machiavelli declares that mercenary troops cannot be included under the designation of "good arms." Lacking the loyalty of a citizen-raised army, mercenary troops are unreliable and ruinous. Reliant on a ruler only for their wages, mercenary soldiers lack the deep devotion and dependence that makes citizens armies into formidable opponents. Italy's reliance on these "bad arms" has made it impossible for rulers to lay strong foundations for their states.

Mercenary commanders "are either skilled in warfare or they are not," but in both instances they lead to ruin. If they are skilled, then they are more anxious to advance their own agenda than to serve their employer. If they are not skilled, then they will lose battles and ruin the prince "in the normal way." Machiavelli cites the Romans, Spartans, and Swiss as examples of states that maintained their sovereignty by raising their own armies. By contrast, the Carthaginians were nearly ruined by their reliance on mercenaries. Machiavelli offers Francesco Sforza as a modern example of the danger of mercenary troops, recounting how Sforza, a mercenary of Milan, eventually subjugated his employers and installed himself as the duke of Milan. Machiavelli does concede that the Florentines and Venetians have achieved some conquests with mercenary troops, although he attributes these successes to luck.

Rulers who hire mercenary troops will find themselves in a lose-lose situation. If a mercenary commander possesses prowess, then he will attempt to overthrow the current prince and claim power for himself. However, if the commander isn't skilled, then he will simply lose battles at the prince's expense. Machiavelli cites the highly skilled Sforza, himself a mercenary, to illustrate the danger of mercenaries. Through a combination of prowess and fortune, Sforza bridged the gap between the masses and the elite, using skill and opportunity to become the duke of Milan. Wise rulers must avoid the temptation of mercenary armies.

Discussing the Venetians' use of mercenaries, Machiavelli tells the story of how Venice, in "one day's engagement," lost the territory that it had taken them "eight hundred years' exertion to conquer." With this example, Machiavelli declares, "Mercenary armies bring only slow, belated, and feeble conquests, but sudden, startling defeat." Machiavelli then turns to the history of other Italian states that have relied on mercenaries, arguing that the priests-turned-popes and the citizens-turned-princes who have come to dominate Italy rely on mercenaries due to their lack of experience in military matters. As a result of Italian's reliance on foreign troops, the French, Spanish, and Swiss have overrun Italy. The Italians' mercenary troops have fought weakly, attempting to avoid "both exertion and danger" and therefore failing in the war. Machiavelli concludes that mercenaries "have led Italy into slavery."

Machiavelli blames Italy's current ruin on the inexperience of its novice rulers, who lack the military prowess necessary to lay strong foundations for their states. These rulers' lack of prowess contributes to their reliance on foreign arms, which undermines the stability of their principalities. Machiavelli strongly advises rulers to avoid the use of mercenaries, since they prioritize their own wellbeing over the interests of their princely employer. According to Machiavelli, ruin is the inevitable result of a prince's continued dependence on mercenaries.

CHAPTER 13

Machiavelli transitions to a discussion of auxiliaries, "the other kind of useless troops." Auxiliary troops are the foreign armies of a powerful ally who comes to the defense of another state. Although Machiavelli concedes that auxiliaries are sometimes "useful and reliable," their use typically spells "disaster" for the one who calls on them. If a prince uses auxiliaries and is defeated, then he is left defenseless. In the alternative situation, the auxiliaries are "victorious" and the prince is essentially under their control. Machiavelli cites the modern example of Pope Julius II to illustrate the potential danger of auxiliary troops. Julius's decision to throw himself "into the hands of a foreigner" was "ill-considered." However, by chance Julius escaped disaster when his auxiliaries failed to conquer and yet the opposing armies retreated due to extenuating circumstances. Others, such as the Florentines, ruined themselves with the use of auxiliaries.

Like mercenaries, auxiliary troops are "useless" because they prioritize their own self-interest before the interests of their princely employer. However, auxiliaries present a unique threat because they retain clear loyalty to a ruler other than their employer. Rulers who seek to defend their states with auxiliary arms will only undermine their own power and security. Machiavelli attributes Julius II's successful use of auxiliary troops to a stroke of luck and condemns his reliance on foreign arms. As Machiavelli stressed previously, rulers must avoid all actions that cede power to others. A prince who uses auxiliaries necessarily surrenders power to a foreign state.

Machiavelli argues that auxiliaries are even more dangerous than mercenary troops, since auxiliaries "constitute a united army, wholly obedient to the orders of someone else." Auxiliaries are "fatal," and therefore wise princes shun them and make use of their own forces. While cowardice is the gravest danger with mercenaries, valor is the danger with auxiliaries. According to Machiavelli, a prudent ruler would rather lose battles with his own troops "than win them with others," knowing that "no true victory is possible with alien arms."

Although auxiliaries are loyal, their loyalty is misdirected, since it binds these troops to their own prince instead of the ruler who hires them. Auxiliary troops are typically better organized than mercenaries, a fact which paradoxically renders auxiliaries even more ruinous than mercenaries. Even at the expense of losing battles, rulers should opt for their own arms over foreign troops.

Discussing Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli writes, "One can easily see the difference between these forces by considering the difference between the standing of the duke [Borgia]" when he used them. Borgia began his conquests with auxiliaries and then decided they were "unsafe," moving to mercenary troops. Having increased his power but finding these troops "disloyal," he decided to raise his own troops, achieving the greatest success in that way. He gained "real respect" only after becoming "absolute master of his armies."

As Borgia learned, citizen armies serve rulers more loyally than mercenary and auxiliary troops. Machiavelli urges princes to become self-reliant in matters of war and defense, stating that to secure and defend their states, princes must fight with their own arms. Additionally, he states that the use of native arms will increase a ruler's prestige, which further fortifies his position.

Citing the ancient examples of Hiero of Syracuse and David of the Old Testament, Machiavelli concludes, "Armor belonging to someone else either drops off you or weighs you down or is too tight." Returning to a contemporary example, Machiavelli argues that France, which uses a composite force of French troops and Swiss mercenaries, possesses an army that is "far inferior to a [purely] citizen army." While composite forces are superior to purely mercenary or auxiliary troops, this reliance on outside arms is "poisonous" and will plague the state like a **wasting fever**.

Using the metaphor of a wasting disease, Machiavelli describes the way in which a reliance on foreign arms steadily erodes a prince's power and security. Rulers must avoid the temptation of foreign arms and instead rely only on their own armies, regardless of whether their troops' abilities appear to be inferior to those of hired arms.

Machiavelli declares, "The prince who does not detect evils the moment they appear is lacking in true wisdom." Nonetheless, most rulers lack this crucial ability. Machiavelli ties the downfall of the Roman empire to its fateful decision to hire the Goths as mercenaries. Eventually, the Goths "inherited the prowess which the Romans lost." Machiavelli concludes, "Unless it commands its own arms no principality is secure; rather, it is dependent on fortune."

A ruler who relies on foreign arms for his defense places his fate in the hands of fortune. Because princes must depend on their own prowess rather than fortune, rulers should proactively raise and train their own armies. Wise princes will detect and avoid the risks of foreign troops, eventually inheriting the lost states and "prowess" of lesser rulers.

CHAPTER 14

Having discussed the various types of troops, Machiavelli asserts that a prince "must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline." The "art of war" must be the primary focus of a ruler. Military knowledge is "so useful" that "besides enabling hereditary princes to maintain their rule it frequently enables ordinary citizens to become rulers." Machiavelli writes, "The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war."

Machiavelli again emphasizes the overriding importance of military prowess, encouraging rulers to focus on "the art of war" before all other concerns. Military organization lays the foundation for the stability of the state and is a critical skill for both established and new rulers. There can be no security without military might.

To illustrate this principal, Machiavelli invokes the story of Francesco Sforza and his sons. With his knowledge of war, Sforza rose to become Duke of Milan. On the other hand, his sons, including Ludovico, "sank to being ordinary citizens after being dukes" because they neglected the art of war. If a prince is unarmed, he is "bound to meet misfortune" for obvious reasons, in addition to the fact that the "people despise you." A prince who does not understand warfare will not win the respect of his soldiers, and therefore he cannot place "any trust" in them.

As the story of Sforza and his sons illustrates, all princes must possess military prowess or risk losing their states. An unarmed prince is vulnerable not only to foreign invasions but also to the hatred of his people. The people will despise any prince who fails to protect them and thus ignores a crucial part of the social contract between rulers and subjects. A prince who does not protect his people cannot expect their loyalty in return.

Machiavelli urges a prince to study warfare "more vigorously in peace than in war." This study should be "both physical and mental," so that the prince's body and mind become accustomed to hardships. A prince should also learn "practical geography," a skill that can be easily applied to a variety of different provinces. In this way, the ruler will learn how to gain the tactical advantage in battle, regardless of the local geography.

Princes must engage in physical and mental exercises to enhance their military prowess. Through diligent study, princes can strengthen and build on their natural abilities. In peacetime princes must proactively study warfare in anticipation of future tests. Rulers must always prepare for the inevitability of war.

To complete his "intellectual training," a prince should read history, "studying the actions of eminent men" and learning from their successes and failures. The wise prince should model his behavior on "some historical figure who has been praised and honored." Machiavelli cites ancient leaders who have similarly modeled their actions on their eminent predecessors. Finally, a prince must "never take things easy in times of peace, but rather use . . . [it] assiduously, in order to be able to reap the profit in times of adversity."

Machiavelli advises princes to use peacetime to their military advantage. By preparing for war in times of peace, rulers will be ready for the challenges of wartime when it inevitably comes. Rulers should model themselves on the heroes of earlier generations, using their successes and failures to inform decision-making.

CHAPTER 15

Machiavelli introduces a discussion of the way in which a prince "must regulate his conduct towards his subjects or his allies." Acknowledging that this subject has been discussed many times before, Machiavelli declares his intention to "draw up an original set of rules" that will "prove of practical use," representing the reality of the world. Accepting the "real truth" of human nature, Machiavelli writes, "A man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous." Therefore, a ruler who wants to secure his position "must be prepared not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need."

Taking a cynical view of human nature, Machiavelli argues that rulers must sometimes act unvirtuously because the people that surround them will not hesitate to behave unvirtuously when it benefits them. Machiavelli argues that princes are held to a different moral standard than that which dictates behavior for the masses. In the interest of protecting their positions, rulers must be willing to abandon moral qualms and to fight fire with fire.

Because princes live a public life that is "more exposed to view," they are "judged for the various qualities which earn them either praise or condemnation." Machiavelli argues that, due to the "conditions of the world," princes cannot possess or exercise only those attributes that are deemed morally good. Nonetheless, a prudent ruler must avoid "the evil reputation" attached to certain vices. Machiavelli encourages princes to "not flinch from being blamed for vices which are necessary for safeguarding the state." Machiavelli concludes that some of the traits considered virtuous will in fact ruin a prince, while some that appear to be vices "will bring him security and prosperity."

For princes, Machiavelli argues that the typical relationship between virtues and vices is often reversed, meaning that virtuous actions lead to ruin and immoral actions result in security and stability. Because many in the world are evil and immoral, a prince must defend his position and combat these forces with vices of his own. Living a public life with special demands, princes must be allowed certain moral liberties that would be condemned in the masses.

CHAPTER 16

To begin his more specific discussion of particular virtues and vices, Machiavelli first turns to generosity and miserliness. While Machiavelli states that it is "splendid" for a prince to have a reputation for generosity, he argues that a prince who is genuinely generous "will come to grief." This is because for a prince to actually earn a reputation for generosity, he must be "ostentatiously lavish" in order to attract the attention of the people. Any prince who spends so lavishly "will soon squander all his resources" and find himself forced "to impose extortionate taxes" on his people. If a prince places excessive financial burdens on his subjects, then the people will come to hate him and resent his poor judgment. Therefore, a prudent prince will "not mind being called a miser." His "parsimony" will eventually be seen as generosity, since it saves the people from the burden of excessive taxation.

Machiavelli describes the chain of cause and effect that will lead to a generous prince becoming a hated prince. A prince must be miserly in order to avoid burdening his subjects with high taxes, since excessive taxation will cause the people to hate their extravagant ruler. A ruler who burdens his subjects with unnecessary taxes breaks his obligation to protect his people and thus earns their scorn. However, Machiavelli encourages princes to maintain the appearance of generosity while avoiding actual liberality. In time the people will come to regard a prince's miserliness as a form of generosity, since it preserves their own property by protecting the prosperity and effectiveness of the state.

Citing several modern examples, Machiavelli argues that "great things have been accomplished only by those who have been held miserly, and the others have met disaster." Pope Julius II used his reputation for generosity in order to win the papacy; however, after his election "he made no effort to maintain this reputation," opting for miserliness in order to finance the Church's wars. Louis XII, the king of France, has also used his parsimony to finance foreign campaigns without excessively taxing his people. Finally, Ferdinand of Aragon's success similarly rests on his miserliness.

While aspiring rulers may find it useful to maintain a reputation for generosity on the way up, prudent princes must abandon this supposed virtue once they gain power. The princely virtue of miserliness allows rulers to finance wars and defense without altering taxation, which strengthens the state and keeps the people satisfied. Miserliness funds a prince's military, which in turn lays the foundation for his state.

Machiavelli asserts, "Miserliness is one of those vices which sustain his [a prince's] rule." In the name of not robbing his subjects and maintaining the ability to defend his state, a ruler's miserliness is in fact a virtue. Nonetheless, Machiavelli adds a caveat: those who are already princes should avoid generosity, while those who "are on the way to becoming" princes should "certainly" maintain "a reputation for generosity." Machiavelli references Julius Caesar, who established his rule over Rome by cultivating a reputation for generosity.

Typically accepted as a vice, miserliness is in fact a virtue necessary to the preservation of the state. As previously stated, aspiring princes will be aided in their rise by a reputation for generosity, which will initially earn them the people's support. However, an established ruler must eschew generosity in favor penny-pinching, which will support the state's institutions.

Machiavelli adds another qualification to his general rule: a prince should be "frugal" with regards to his own or his people's property, but he should "indulge his generosity to the full" with regards to the property of foreigners or foes. A prince "who campaigns with his armies, who lives by pillaging .... must be open-handed," or else his soldiers will desert him. Referencing Julius Caesar, Cyrus, and Alexander the Great, Machiavelli permits that rulers may "be more liberal with what does not belong to you or your subjects." In fact, rulers who liberally distribute plundered property may actually increase their standing at home. Above all else, a prince must avoid "being despised and hated," and Machiavelli cautions that generosity typically leads to both outcomes.

While a prince must refrain from stealing his subjects' property, he can afford to liberally give away the looted property of conquered foreigners and other opponents. A prince must frugally protect the property of his subjects as if it were his own, although he must be willing to reward loyal soldiers and subjects with property pillaged in war. This particular type of generosity will increase a prince's prestige. However, misguided generosity will result in the people's hatred, which a ruler must avoid at all costs.

CHAPTER 17

Contemplating virtues and vices, Machiavelli transitions to a discussion of compassion and cruelty. Machiavelli states that a prince "must want to have a reputation for compassion rather than for cruelty." However, Machiavelli warns rulers to "not make bad use of compassion." Machiavelli cites Cesare Borgia's cruelty in subduing the Romagna as a modern example of cruelty used well. Borgia's cruelty "restored order and obedience" and reunified the Romagna, and thus Machiavelli finds "compassion" in Borgia's behavior. Machiavelli urges rulers not to worry if they earn a reputation for cruelty as long as their cruelty keeps their subjects "united and loyal." Targeted cruelty, such as public execution, that maintains order is truer compassion than misguided leniency that results in widespread "murder" and chaos.

Returning to the idea of cruelty used well or badly, Machiavelli demonstrates the way in which cruelty, if used well, may be seen as a virtue. When used to restore order and unify a state, cruelty becomes a form of compassion, saving the people from chaos and rampant disorder. On the other hand, misguided leniency breeds unrest, which subjects the people to widespread violence and other cruelties. By using targeted cruelty and public punishments, a prince projects his control and curbs chaos. For a prince, well-used cruelty is an act of compassion while undiscerning leniency is an act of cruelty.

Machiavelli declares that a new prince "finds it impossible to avoid a reputation for cruelty," due to the "abundant dangers inherent in a newly won state." Nonetheless, Machiavelli cautions princes to temper their conduct with "humanity and prudence" so that they do not become overzealous or "unbearable" due to "excessive distrust" of their subjects.

New states are unique in the "dangers" that they pose to rulers and therefore new princes must clearly establish their authority through selective shows of cruelty. Rulers must dole out their cruelty with justice to earn the people's trust.

Machiavelli introduces the question of whether it is better for a prince to be loved than feared, "or the reverse." He answers that, ideally, a prince would be both feared and loved by his subjects. However, because it is "difficult to combine them," Machiavelli concludes, "It is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both." Machiavelli asserts that people are generally "ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers." While "danger is remote," they are loyal, but when danger approaches, they flee. A prince who secures his rule with "a bond of gratitude" will ensure "his own ruin." On the other hand, fear "is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective."

Maintaining his cynical opinion of human nature, Machiavelli advises rulers to use the fear of punishment as a safeguard against the vices and bad behavior of many subjects. Because people can be relied upon to act immorally, a prince must use fear and the threat of force to keep his subjects in line. People more often respond to fear than to compassion and thus a prince must endeavor at the very least to make his subjects fear him.

However, Machiavelli cautions that a prince "must make himself feared in such a way that .... he escapes being hated." According to Machiavelli, "Fear is quite compatible with an absence of hatred." Machiavelli declares, "The prince can always avoid hatred if he abstains from the property of his subjects and citizens and from their women." A prince's theft of his subjects' property or honor will incur hatred, because "men sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony."

Machiavelli maintains a distinction between fear and hatred, arguing that fear enhances a ruler's power while hatred inevitably erodes it. Rulers must strike a careful balance between fear and hatred to avoid being overthrown by vengeful masses. Above all, rulers must leave the property of their subjects intact.

Machiavelli argues that a prince in command of his army "need not worry about having a reputation for cruelty," since harshness will keep the army "united and disciplined." Machiavelli applauds the ancient commander Hannibal for his skilled use of cruelty in order to preserve his massive and diverse army. Machiavelli asserts that Hannibal's reputation for "inhuman cruelty was wholly responsible" for the fear and respect that he commanded from his formidable army. On the other hand, Machiavelli condemns Hannibal's opponent, the Roman general Scipio, for his tendency towards "excessive leniency." Scipio's inability to effectively discipline his troops led them to mutiny in Spain and resulted in repeated insubordination. According to Machiavelli, Scipio found "fame and glory" in spite of this critical failing.

In the maintenance of an army, a leader's cruelty is absolutely essential to command the respect and discipline of the soldiers. Hannibal's reputation for cruelty and his skilled use of punishment organized and unified his army. On the other hand, Scipio, who lacked Hannibal's military prowess, tended towards leniency, which weakened Rome and its army. While Scipio earned "fame and glory" for his leniency, Machiavelli calls this praise misguided, identifying Scipio's compassion as a vice. When commanding an army, princes should strive to develop a reputation for cruelty.

Machiavelli concludes, "Since some men love as they please but fear when the prince pleases, a wise prince should rely on what he controls," which is fear. Although a prince should strive to inspire a certain degree of fear, "he must only endeavor . . . to escape being hated" by his subjects.

A prince must use prowess to walk the line between fear and hatred, securing his state through the threat of force. Machiavelli advises rulers to rely on prowess, which they control, rather than fortune.

CHAPTER 18

Discussing the way in which princes "should honor their word," Machiavelli writes that while it is "praiseworthy" for a ruler "to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings," contemporary examples demonstrate that successful princes give "their word lightly." The modern rulers "who have achieved great things" were those who knew how "to trick men with their cunning," triumphing over those who clung to "honest principles."

Machiavelli again emphasizes that princes are held to a moral standard that reverses the typical distinction between virtues and vices. Wise rulers will seek to develop their cunning and intellect, which form a crucial aspect of their prowess. Rulers must not shirk from breaking promises when necessary.

Machiavelli states that there "are two ways of fighting: by law or by force." Fighting by the law is "natural to men," while fighting by force is natural to animals. Machiavelli argues that rulers must know how to fight like "beasts" because fighting by law "often proves inadequate" on its own. Citing ancient allegories in which princes like Achilles were trained by centaurs (creatures that are "half beast and half man"), Machiavelli explains that princes must learn from the nature of both man and beast in order to survive.

Machiavelli highlights the importance of using laws and arms to secure one's position. However, Machiavelli states that defending one's state by law alone "often proves inadequate," a statement that underscores his primary focus on arms. The description of manlike and beastlike prowess draws on the same union of opposites that defines much of Machiavelli's advice.

Since a ruler must learn to act like a beast, Machiavelli urges princes to study "**the fox and the lion**." The lion is "defenseless against traps" but can easily "frighten off wolves." Conversely, the fox is "defenseless against wolves" but can ably "recognize traps." From this metaphor, Machiavelli concludes, "A prudent ruler cannot .... honor his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist." "This precept" holds because "men are wretched creatures" who frequently break their own promises. Machiavelli writes, "Those who have known best how to imitate the fox have come off best." Thus, an able ruler must be an adept "liar and deceiver." Machiavelli cites the "fresh example" of Alexander VI, who "never did anything, or thought of anything, other than deceiving men." As a master of deception, Alexander always achieved his ends.

In order to possess true prowess, a prince must absorb the lessons of the fox and the lion, combining cunning and force to overcome any number of challenges. By honing the skills of these two different beasts, a prince will provide himself with a well-rounded set of abilities. Like a fox, princes must be crafty and cunning, keeping their word only when it benefits their own interests. To survive and prosper, a ruler must be a skilled "deceiver" or else he will be tricked by the conniving and self-serving figures that surround him. To be a successful ruler is to be a skilled liar and in the service of the state dishonesty becomes a virtue.

Machiavelli adds, "A prince .... need not necessarily have all the good qualities I mentioned above, but he should certainly appear to have them." However, if a prince actually possesses good qualities and allows them to dictate his conduct, then he will find these attributes "harmful." It is only if he *appears* to have these traits that "they will render him service." A prince, especially a new prince, cannot always act virtuously, because "in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, [and] of religion." A ruler should possess a "flexible disposition" that varies with the dictates of fortune. If possible, a prince "should not deviate from what is good," but he must know "how to do evil, if that is necessary."

For princes, the distinction between virtues and vices relies on the specific circumstances. A skilled ruler will possess the prowess and "flexible" demeanor necessary to decide whether a situation demands virtue or vice. Machiavelli stresses that a ruler should not agonize over the occasional need to act unvirtuously, since his highest priority must always be the preservation of his position and state. However, a prince must concern himself with preserving the pretense of virtue, which will win him favor.

In front of his subjects, a prince must always appear to be "a man of compassion, a man of good faith, a man of integrity, a kind and a religious man." In particular, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of this last characteristic. Machiavelli argues that the people judge princes by outward displays and are "always impressed by appearances and results." Machiavelli cites a "certain contemporary ruler, whom it is better not to name," who preaches "peace and good faith" and acts in violation of both. This behavior, however, has allowed him to maintain his state and his standing.

Because princes are judged on "appearances," it is necessary to maintain the façade of virtue to appease the people. Ferdinand of Aragon, the unnamed "contemporary ruler," talks of peace, but his violent actions contradict his words. It requires great prowess to maintain the pretense of virtue while acting in the unvirtuous way needed to secure one's state.

CHAPTER 19

Having discussed the most important virtues and vices, Machiavelli turns to the other qualities, which he groups under a generalization: "The prince should .... determine to avoid anything which will make him hated and despised." A prince will earn hatred if he steals "the property and the women of his subjects," and therefore he "must refrain from these." A prince will be despised "if he has a reputation for being fickle, frivolous, effeminate, cowardly, [and] irresolute." A ruler must avoid these behaviors "like the **plague**." A prince must demonstrate "grandeur, courage, sobriety, [and] strength" and act in such a way that "no one ever dreams of trying to deceive or trick him."

Machiavelli again stresses the extreme importance of avoiding the hatred and scorn of one's subjects. A prince must abstain from behaviors, such as theft and extortionate taxation, that unnecessarily enrage the populace. A skilled ruler will avoid the vices, like indecision and cowardice, that will poison his state and turn the people against him. A ruler must exude prowess and gain a reputation for certain virtues so that his opponents are not tempted to challenge or undermine his control.

A prince who earns this reputation will gain respect, and "against a man who is highly esteemed conspiracy is difficult, and open attack is difficult." A prince must have two fears: "internal subversion from his subjects; and external aggression by foreign powers." A ruler can defend himself against foreign foes by being "well armed and having good allies." Machiavelli writes that good allies follow from good arms. A prince can overcome internal threats by managing relations with foreign powers and guarding against conspiracy. Machiavelli argues, "One of the most powerful safeguards a prince can have against conspiracies is to avoid being hated by the populace." A conspirator will never carry out his deed if he believes that he will "outrage the people." A potential conspirator always fears the "prospect of punishment," and if he also fears the hostility of the prince's loyal subjects, then he will never attempt his crime.

As previously explained, a prince who possesses good arms and avoids the hatred of the people ably protects himself against foreign and domestic threats. The goodwill of the people functions as a useful deterrent against conspiracies and rebellion. Machiavelli once again highlights the value of good arms, from which "good allies" and stability follow. If a prince maintains the goodwill and loyal support of his subjects, then a potential conspirator fears both princely revenge and the wrath of the prince's devoted subjects. In short, the people form a critical aspect of a prince's defense.

Machiavelli references a modern example of this principle, recounting the conspiracy of the Canneschi against Annibale Bentivogli, the prince of Bologna. The Canneschi family of Bologna killed Annibale, whose only heir was the infant Giovanni. Immediately, the people "rose up and killed all the Canneschi" due to "the goodwill that existed for the House of Bentivoglio at that period." A regent ruled in Giovanni's stead until he was "old enough to assume the government himself." Therefore, a prince can protect himself with the goodwill of the people, but if the people are hostile, then "he must go in fear of everything and everyone." A wise prince takes "great pains not to make the nobles despair, and to satisfy the people and keep them content." This is one of the most important tasks that a prince faces.

Machiavelli emphasizes the mutual dependence that exists between the people and their ruler. An able and just ruler promises to protect his people and abstain from their property; in return, they promise to rise up and fight in his favor. A prince's reward for skilled rule is the people's goodwill, which critically supplements physical defenses. Additionally, a ruler must strive to appease both the nobles and the people, a difficult task because their interests are often at odds. A prince must balance the concerns of the elite with those of the masses.

Machiavelli cites France as a kingdom that is "well organized and governed." The French king's security rests on the "countless valuable institutions" of the state, especially its parliament. As an "independent arbiter" that functions somewhat separately from the king, the parliament balances the power of the nobles and the people, keeping both groups in check and allowing the king to refrain from favoring one faction over the other. From this "sensible institution," Machiavelli deduces a general rule: "Princes should delegate to others the enactment of unpopular measures and keep in their own hands the means of winning favors." A prince must "value the nobles," but not to the extent that he makes himself "hated by the people," who are the perennial opponents of the nobles.

Machiavelli encourages princes to use institutions to delegate tasks and to maintain the balance of power between competing interest groups. With a system of checks like the one that exists in France, a ruler can appease both the nobles and the people without angering either faction. As with other delicate issues, a prince must walk a fine line between these opposing groups, taking care to avoid incurring their hatred. A prince who delegates "unpopular measures" directs his subjects' anger away from himself. A ruler who dispenses favors attracts their goodwill.

To support his conclusions, Machiavelli turns to the examples of several Roman emperors. Machiavelli begins by noting a particular challenge that Roman rulers faced: "Whereas other princes have to contend only with the ambition of the nobles and the insolence of the people," the Romans also had to manage the greed of the soldiers. Many emperors found it difficult to appease both the people and the soldiers, since the people sought peace while the soldiers "loved a warlike ruler." Therefore, those rulers who could not control both the people and the soldiers inevitably "came to grief." Machiavelli adds, "Princes cannot help arousing hatred in some quarters, so first they must strive not to be hated by . . . every class of subject; and when this proves impossible, they should strive assiduously to escape the hatred of the most powerful classes."

If a prince cannot avoid incurring hatred, then he must take care to avoid the hatred of the most powerful faction. A prince must be shrewd in his efforts to temper the hatred of certain groups and must cunningly maintain the goodwill of influential classes. In short, a ruler must balance out hatred with equal and opposite goodwill. Drawing on ancient examples to give his opinions legitimacy, Machiavelli again stresses the importance of loyal arms. Machiavelli's practical advice ignores moral qualms and focuses on the security of the state.

Machiavelli writes that the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius, Pertinax, and Alexander, "who all lived unadventurously, who loved justice, hated cruelty, [and] were kind and courteous," met "unhappy" ends, with the exception of Marcus. Marcus maintained high esteem "because he succeeded to the empire by hereditary right, and did not have to thank either the soldiers or the populace for it." However, Pertinax came to grief because he became emperor against the soldiers' will and then attempted to enforce rules of decency on them. Machiavelli writes, "And here it should be noted that one can be hated just as much for good deeds as for evil ones." Machiavelli explains that a ruler must adopt "the same disposition" as "the class of men" on which his "continued ruled depends" to satisfy them and secure his position. The Roman army killed the emperor Alexander, renowned for his "goodness," because it considered him "effeminate."

Returning to his discussion of virtue and vice, Machiavelli explains that rulers can as easily weaken their positions with "good deeds" as with "evil ones." For a ruler, the distinction between virtue and vice is largely circumstantial. Machiavelli also encourages rulers to adapt their policy to their circumstances, adopting "the same disposition" as the class on which their power rests. If a prince's main constituents are ruthless, then a prince must act ruthlessly to appease this faction. Rulers must secure the goodwill of their most powerful supports in order to secure the state itself. Marcus alone, established as a hereditary ruler, prospered while acting virtuously.

In contrast, Commodus, Severus, Antoninus Caracalla, and Maximinus, who were all "extremely cruel" and greedy rulers, met "unhappy ends," with the exception of Severus. Despite his oppression of the people, Severus "reigned successfully" because he maintained the friendship of the soldiers. Severus' prowess "so impressed" the people that they remained "astonished and stupefied" while the soldiers "stayed respectful and content."

Severus was able to incur the hatred of the people because he maintained the goodwill of a more powerful faction, the Roman soldiers. Additionally, the people so feared Severus' prowess that they refrained from conspiring against him. Suited to the times, Severus' unsavory qualities functioned as virtues, fortifying his rule.

Machiavelli elevates Severus, who as a new prince ably acted "the part of both **a fox and a lion**," as an "outstanding" example for new rulers. Under the pretext of avenging Pertinax's death, Severus marched his army on Rome, which prompted the Senate, "out of fear," to declare him emperor. To overcome the remaining divisions between the western and Asiatic parts of the empire, Severus tricked Albinus, who hoped to rule the western half of the empire, into aiding his campaign against Pescennius Niger, commander of the Asiatic army. After defeating Niger, Severus turned on Albinus, eventually conquering his state and killing him. Machiavelli praises Severus' conduct as a "ferocious lion and a very cunning fox," applauding his ability to maintain fear and respect without becoming hated by the troops. Machiavelli argues that Severus' "tremendous prestige always protected him from the hatred which his plundering had inspired in the people."

Severus' effectively used fear to secure his position as a new ruler, employing cruelty and cunning to keep his opponents and subjects in line. Machiavelli applauds Severus' prowess, using this ancient example to support his advice that rulers must act "the part of both a fox and a lion." Severus exercised a combination of military might and cunning to overcome an array of opponents and obstacles. These paired talents allowed Severus' to earn the soldiers' goodwill, which counteracted the scorn that "his plundering had inspired in the people." Maintaining the friendship of the most powerful class, Severus secured himself against domestic and foreign threats.

Severus' son, Antoninus Caracalla, was also a "military man" who won the devotion of the soldiers. However, Antoninus' "ferocity and cruelty were so great and unparalleled . . . that he became universally hated." As a result, one of Antoninus' own soldiers assassinated him. As a side note, Machiavelli adds, "Princes cannot escape death if the attempt is made by a fanatic, because anyone who has no fear of death himself can succeed in inflicting it." However, Machiavelli notes, "Such assassinations are very rare." Returning to Antoninus, Machiavelli asserts that a prince should not gravely injure "anyone in his service whom he has close to him in affairs of state," which constituted Antoninus' mistake.

As emphasized earlier, rulers must avoid all actions that earn them hatred and scorn. With excessive and unpurposeful vices, Antoninus inspired the hatred of both the people and the soldiers, which resulted in his downfall. Antoninus' violence presents an example of cruelty used poorly, since the extent of the cruelty rendered Antoninus "universally hated" instead of feared and respected. Assassinated by one of his own soldiers, Antoninus fell to the lethal hatred of his subjects.

Turning to Commodus, Machiavelli explains that, as the son of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus succeeded to the throne by hereditary right and thus should have found ruling the empire "an easy task." Commodus needed only "to follow in the footsteps of his father" to control the soldiers and the people. However, with his "cruel, bestial disposition," Commodus earned the hatred of the people by stealing from his subjects, Similarly, Commodus "forgot his dignity" when he "descended into the amphitheaters to fight with gladiators," which made the soldiers despise him. Hated by both the people and the soldiers, a conspiracy resulted in Commodus' death.

Like Antoninus, Commodus' excessive vice earned him the soldiers' and the people's hatred, which ultimately led to his downfall. With a hereditary right to the throne, Commodus should have ruled securely, needing only to build on the institutions and practices of his father's government. However, Commodus made the critical errors of stealing from his subjects and acting in a way that compromised his dignity. Lacking prowess and hated by all, he was easily overthrown.

Lastly, Machiavelli discusses the rule of Maximinus, a "very warlike man" who, with the favor of the soldiers, succeeded to the empire after the effeminate Alexander's death. Maximinus' reign was short, owing to the fact that he was hated and despised for two reasons: Maximinus was of low birth, which "lowered him in everyone's eyes," and also gained a reputation for extreme savagery. Therefore, the people and the soldiers conspired against Maximinus and killed him.

Although Maximinus earned hatred due to his savagery, he also incurred scorn owing to his low birth. With this detail, Machiavelli hints that both the masses and the nobles dislike taking orders from rulers of lowly birth. Using cruelty poorly, Maximinus failed to secure his position and thus the people and soldiers, united by their hatred, overthrew him.

Machiavelli concludes his discussion of Roman emperors by stating, "Contemporary princes are less troubled by this problem of having to take extraordinary measures to satisfy the soldiers," because modern rulers do not possess the massive standing armies that Rome maintained. Machiavelli declares, "In our own times it is necessary for all rulers, except the Turk and the Sultan, to conciliate [i.e., appease] the people rather than the soldiers, because the people are the more powerful." Machiavelli leaves out the Turk and the Sultan because they both maintain large standing armies.

In Renaissance Italy the growing masses constituted the most important faction, which Machiavelli encourages rulers to appease. Because the people possess such power in modern societies, rulers must gain their goodwill or risk losing their states to conspiracy or insurrection. By Machiavelli's time few states maintained large standing armies and thus the masses replaced soldiers as the most powerful and influential class.

Summarizing his analysis of the Roman emperors, Machiavelli attributes the downfall of emperors to "either hatred or scorn." Machiavelli concludes, "A new prince in a new principality cannot imitate the actions of Marcus Aurelius, nor is he bound to follow those of Severus." Instead, Machiavelli recommends that a prince carefully combine varying models of conduct, selecting from Severus "the qualities necessary to establish his state, and from Marcus Aurelius those which are conducive to its maintenance and glory after it has been stabilized and made secure."

In line with much of his advice, Machiavelli encourages a ruler to strike a balance between extremes, tailoring tried-and-true tactics to one's own circumstances. Rulers must draw on a differing set of methods when establishing their power and when subsequently maintaining a secured state. A prince must use prowess to distinguish between virtues and vices, thus protecting himself from hatred and sure defeat.

CHAPTER 20

Machiavelli introduces a discussion of the various ways in which princes can "keep a secure hold on their states." Some rulers have chosen to disarm their subjects, while some foster divisions amongst their people. Still others "put up fortresses," while others "have razed them to the ground." Machiavelli writes that it is "impossible to give a final verdict on any of these policies," because the "particular circumstances" of the different states have bearing on whether their policies succeed or fail. Nonetheless, Machiavelli attempts to analyze these policies "in generalizations."

Machiavelli outlines the variety of arms and defenses that princes may use to secure their states. As he declares with many other issues, Machiavelli argues that the utility of these methods depends on the circumstances in which they are used. While one prince may succeed with fortresses, another may find them to be a hindrance to his rule. Princes must ground their decisions in knowledge of their "particular circumstances."

Machiavelli advises, "No new prince has ever at any time disarmed his subjects; rather .... he has always given them arms." Machiavelli contends that a prince who arms his subjects thereby arms himself. He argues that this practice causes "those who were suspect [to] become loyal, and those who were loyal not only remain so but are changed from being merely your subjects to being your partisans." However, if a ruler chooses to disarm his people, then he begins "to offend them" by demonstrating his own "cowardice and suspicion," which in turn provokes hatred. If a ruler disarms his people, then he also forces himself to employ mercenary troops, which will likely lead to his ruin. Thus, Machiavelli concludes, "A new prince in a new principality always arms his subjects."

Highlighting the mutual dependence of the masses and their ruler, Machiavelli urges princes to transform their subjects into loyal "partisans" by arming them. By allowing the people to carry arms in one's defense, a prince demonstrates his trust and good faith in his subjects, which fosters goodwill. On the other hand, a prince who disarms his subjects not only offends them, but also leaves himself defenseless. Arming one's subjects offers a twofold defense, providing a ruler with a strong army and goodwill.

Conversely, when a prince acquires a new state that he annexes to his original principality, he "must disarm his new subjects, except for those who were his partisans." With time, the prince must also weaken the partisans, eventually arming only his own soldiers.

A ruler must disarm the people of a newly annexed state or risk arming his subjects for rebellion against himself. Armed subjects present a threat to a conquering prince.

Machiavelli considers the policy of using factions to secure control, stating that earlier generations of Italians thought it necessary "to control Pistoia by means of factions and Pisa by means of fortresses." Thus, rulers "fostered strife" between factions within Pistoia in order to maintain their own dominion. Machiavelli writes, "In those days when there was stability of a sort in Italy, this was doubtless sensible; but I do not think it makes a good rule today." Machiavelli expresses his belief that no good "comes of dissension," since cities that are fiercely divided "inevitably succumb [to enemies] at once." As a modern example, Machiavelli references the Venetians, whose misguided fostering of dissension led to disaster. As happened with the Venetians, Machiavelli argues that war reveals the weakness of this practice.

Machiavelli warns rulers to avoid actions that foster divisions between their citizens. A city that divides itself into many warring factions makes itself vulnerable to foreign invasion. In concert with his earlier advice regarding factions, Machiavelli urges rulers to maintain control over the different classes in their states. Rulers should opt for order over chaos and thus should avoid purposefully weakening their own states through misguided divisiveness.

Machiavelli states that a ruler's greatness rests on his ability to overcome "difficulties and opposition." Machiavelli explains that new princes have a greater need "to acquire standing" than hereditary rulers. Therefore, Machiavelli declares, "Fortune, especially when she wants to build up the greatness of a new prince . . . finds enemies for him and encourages them to take the field against him, so that he may have cause to triumph over them." According to Machiavelli, many suggest that a wise ruler should "cunningly foster some opposition to himself so that by overcoming it" he can increase his own prestige.

Machiavelli encourages rulers to enhance their prowess and prestige through military campaigns. Emerging victorious, rulers will consolidate their power and increase their standing. While rulers should avoid dividing their states into warring factions, they should promote a degree of "opposition," which provides an opportunity for victory. Rulers must balance between rampant factionalism and manageable opposition.

Discussing new princes, Machiavelli states that many new rulers "have found men who were suspect at the start of their rule more loyal and useful than those who, at the start, were their trusted friends." Although Machiavelli explains that it is particularly difficult to generalize on this topic, he asserts that a new prince "will never have any difficulty in winning over those who were initially his enemies." Because those who were "suspect" find it necessary "to wipe out with their actions the bad opinion [the ruler] had formed of them," they will serve a new prince faithfully. On the contrary, friends who feel "secure" are likely to neglect a ruler's interests. Machiavelli urges new princes to "carefully reflect on the motives of those who helped them" to ascend, cautioning that those who offered support due to "discontent with the existing government" will prove difficult to retain and subdue.

A new ruler must carefully assess the character and intentions of the men who aided his ascension to the throne. Machiavelli contends that men who were "suspect" at the start of one's rule will serve a prince particularly loyally because they feel the need to prove their goodwill. These statements dovetail interestingly with Machiavelli's own efforts to prove his loyalty to his royal dedicatee following accusations of conspiracy. Machiavelli advises rulers to "reflect on the motives" of their friends, since these perennial malcontents may betray the ruler in favor of another aspiring prince.

Machiavelli turns finally to fortresses, which can "act as a curb on . . . rebellion" or "provide a safe refuge from sudden attack." Machiavelli asserts, "I approve of this policy, because it has been used from the time of **the ancient world**." Nonetheless, Machiavelli cites several modern examples that contradict this policy, referencing multiple leaders who have chosen to destroy their own fortresses. With this in mind, Machiavelli declares that the utility of fortresses largely depends on the particular circumstances. As a general rule, Machiavelli advises, "The prince who is more afraid of his own people than of foreign interference should build fortresses; but the prince who fears foreign interference more than his own people should forget about them."

In use since antiquity, fortresses have the ability to protect rulers from rebellion and attack. However, Machiavelli emphasizes that the usefulness of fortifications depends on the circumstances of a particular prince. If a prince has the goodwill of his subjects, who will loyally take up arms in his defense, then he has little need for fortresses. However, if a prince is hated, then he should build fortresses. In this instance, a prince does not have recourse to a loyal army and thus must rely on fortresses for his defense.

According to Machiavelli, "The best fortress that exists is to avoid being hated by the people." Machiavelli argues that fortresses cannot save rulers from the hatred of the people. Machiavelli concludes by restating his belief that fortresses may be beneficial or harmful depending on circumstances. However, he criticizes those who place their trust in fortresses and, thinking themselves secure, do not mind being hated by the people.

The goodwill of the people arms a prince in two ways: it protects him from internal conspiracy and it gives him the means to raise a loyal citizen army. Thus, the best method of defense is to maintain the goodwill of one's subjects. The people form the cornerstone of a state's defense and possess the power to dethrone kings.

CHAPTER 21

On the question of how to "win honor," Machiavelli states that nothing brings a ruler "more prestige" than displays of prowess, citing "great campaigns and striking demonstrations of [a prince's] personal abilities." As a modern exemplar, Machiavelli notes Spanish king Ferdinand of Aragon, whom he regards as a new prince. Among his "unparalleled" achievements, Machiavelli references Ferdinand's conquest of Granada (in southern Spain), which "laid the foundation of his power." The campaign allowed Ferdinand to distract and subdue warring barons and to establish his strong standing army. Ferdinand made use of religion to unify his kingdom and to embark on foreign conquests, attacking Africa, Italy, and France. Ferdinand's constant series of "great projects" keeps his subjects "in a state of suspense and wonder" and denies people the opportunity "to foster conspiracies against him."

Prowess, particularly in military skill, provides the means of securing one's state and winning the goodwill of the people. Ferdinand used his prowess to conquer Granada and lay the foundation for his reign. Additionally, Ferdinand shrewdly invoked religion to justify foreign conquests and to tighten his control over his state. Machiavelli applauds Ferdinand's skillful use of religious virtue to support his military ambitions. Finally, Ferdinand's ability to dazzle his people with "great projects" keeps his subjects in line and gives the appearance of great power and invulnerability, which guards against rebellion.

Machiavelli encourages rulers to "give striking demonstrations" on their skill in domestic governance as well. Most importantly, Machiavelli states, "A prince must endeavor to win the reputation of being a great man of outstanding ability."

Skill in domestic and legal matters forms an important aspect of a ruler's prowess. The critical foundation of laws and arms demands both military and legal prowess.

Machiavelli asserts, "A prince also wins prestige for being a true friend or a true enemy, that is, for revealing himself without any reservation in favor of one side against another." Machiavelli advises rulers to opt for partisanship over neutrality. Reminding his reader that it is foolish to avoid war, which can only be postponed to an opponent's advantage, Machiavelli urges rulers to choose sides in disputes between neighboring powers. Machiavelli argues that a ruler who does not declare himself will be at the mercy of the conqueror and will likewise earn the scorn of the loser. Machiavelli writes, "Princes who are irresolute usually follow the path of neutrality in order to escape immediate danger, and usually come to grief." Even if a prince and his ally are defeated, the ally will take pains to "shelter" the prince and the alliance will forge the bonds of friendship between the powers.

Machiavelli identifies indecision as a destructive vice in a prince. Rulers who are irresolute and hesitant will suffer for this critical failing. Instead, Machiavelli advises rulers to choose "partisanship over neutrality" and to boldly involve themselves in conflict, which, as Machiavelli reiterates, a ruler must never postpone. Machiavelli urges a prince to throw his hat in the ring, using military campaigns to earn prestige and win allies. In Machiavelli's eyes, action – even if it ultimately leads to defeat – is often preferable to inaction, which leaves a ruler vulnerable to fortune and foreign foes.

Machiavelli adds that a prince should avoid an "aggressive alliance" with a more powerful state, unless such an alliance "is a matter of necessity." According to Machiavelli, "This is because if you are the victors, you emerge as his [the powerful state's] prisoner." Machiavelli urges princes to avoid actions that place them "at the mercy of others," citing the Venetians misguided and unnecessary alliance with France. However, Machiavelli recognizes that there are situations in which avoiding such an alliance becomes impossible, referencing the Florentines' agreement with France in the face of papal and Spanish aggression. In this instance, a prince must be on his guard, approaching "all possible courses of action as risky." Machiavelli declares, "Prudence consists in being able to assess the nature of a particular threat and in accepting the lesser evil."

A crucial aspect of a prince's prowess lies in his ability to analyze the risks of different decisions and to correctly identify "the lesser evil." Princes must be resolute but careful decision makers, weighing their options and anticipating the potential outcomes. Additionally, rulers must avoid actions that embolden and empower other rulers, since an action that makes a rival state more powerful weakens one's own position and prestige. If possible, princes should avoid decisions that place them "at the mercy of others," since this essentially commits one's fate to fortune instead of prowess.

Finally, Machiavelli advises rulers to win honor by recognizing and rewarding the talents of others, taking care to "actively [encourage] able men, and [to honor] those who excel in their professions." A ruler should honor and reward those who endeavor "to increase the prosperity of his city or his state" through trade, agriculture, or other occupations. A prince should refrain from behaviors that discourage business, such as the theft of subjects' property or the levying of "high taxes." Additionally, a ruler should periodically "entertain the people with shows and festivities." Always maintaining "the dignity of his position," a prince should also pay attention to "guilds" and "family groups" and with his own conduct "give them an example of courtesy" and charity.

Princes of prowess will recognize and reward the skills and achievements of their subjects, since men "who excel in their professions" will help to strengthen and enrich a ruler's state. A ruler must maintain the "dignity" that his position entails, since a noble and regal demeanor functions as a virtue that wins over the people and enhances one's prestige. A prince should permit businesses to prosper, since burgeoning trade and commerce will contribute to a state's overall wealth and strength.

CHAPTER 22

According to Machiavelli, "The choosing of ministers is a matter of no little importance for a prince." Nonetheless, the value of a prince's advisors ultimately depends on the wisdom of the prince himself. Machiavelli writes that the first impression of a ruler's intelligence is based on the "quality" of the men that he chooses to advise him. If his ministers are "competent and loyal," then a prince is considered wise, since he has been intelligent enough to recognize these men's abilities and skillful enough to retain their loyalty. If a prince's advisors are not competent and loyal, then the prince himself is considered deficient.

Observers judge a prince's intelligence on the basis of his ministers' abilities and qualities. A prince must be skilled and intelligent himself in order to profit from the advice of able ministers. A ruler who lacks prowess and wisdom will not derive any benefit from even the most competent advisors. Skilled and loyal ministers are extraordinary assets, but if the prince who employs them lacks wisdom, then their usefulness is lost.

Citing the modern Italian example of the prince of Siena and his skilled chief minister, Machiavelli explains that three types of intelligence exist: "One kind understands things for itself, the second appreciates what others can understand, [and] the third understands neither for itself nor through others." Machiavelli continues, "This first kind is excellent, the second good, and the third kind useless." Machiavelli states that even if a prince "has no acumen [i.e., wisdom] himself," he must possess "the discernment to recognize the good or bad" in the actions of his ministers. In that way, a prince can "praise or correct [his advisors' actions] accordingly" and guard himself against the deceptions and schemes of corrupt ministers.

At the very least, an able prince must possess either wisdom of his own or the ability to assess capably the advice and actions of his ministers. A ruler who possesses neither wisdom nor this skill of discernment will quickly come to ruin. The ability to manage one's advisors forms a key aspect of prowess. A prince must have the intelligence to guide his ministers and the demonstrable prowess to guard against scheming ministers. If not, then power-hungry advisors will exploit a ruler's weakness.

Machiavelli offers advice for princes seeking to assess their ministers. If a minister thinks only of himself and chases "his own profit in everything he does," then he will prove inadequate in his service to a prince. Machiavelli declares, "A man entrusted with the task of government must never think of himself but of the prince." For his part, a prince must attempt "to keep his minister up to the mark" by being "considerate towards him," paying him honor, and sharing with him "both honors and responsibilities." A ruler must strive to make his ministers dependent on his benevolence and ensure that they remain in his debt. If a minister feels sufficiently valued and compensated, then he will "fear changes" and become less likely to betray his employer.

To ably serve the prince, a minister must place the wellbeing of the state and his employer before his own interests. In return, a prince must reward his able ministers with "honors and responsibilities," which convey a ruler's trust. By displaying trust, a ruler earns his ministers' goodwill and ensures their loyalty. As with the masses, a prince must manage his relationship with his advisors so that they remain dependent on the continuance of his rule. In this way, their goodwill guards against conspiracy.

Machiavelli summarizes, "When .... relations between princes and their ministers are of this kind, they can have confidence in each other." If not, then a ruler and his ministers will distrust one another, ending in disaster for one side or the other.

Mutual trust lays the essential foundation for a stable relationship between a prince and his ministers. Without trust there cannot be the goodwill that deters conspiracy.

CHAPTER 23

Machiavelli broaches the "important subject" of flatterers, who "swarm the courts." Machiavelli writes that wise princes who "choose their ministers well" can escape this pitfall, while less able rulers can only avoid it with great difficulty. Because most men are "so happily self-absorbed" and "indulge in .... self-deception," many "fall victim" to the "**plague**" of flattery. Equally dangerous, Machiavelli states, "Some efforts to protect oneself from flatterers involve the risk of becoming despised." This stems from the fact that "the only way to safeguard yourself against flatterers is by letting people understand that you are not offended by the truth." Thus, if everyone is permitted to speak the truth to a prince, he risks losing the respect that secures his position.

Machiavelli warns rulers to avoid the vice of "self-deception," which makes them vulnerable to the "plague" of flattery. Flatterers "swarm" and infect a prince's court, weakening the state by artificially inflating a ruler's ego. A prince must use prowess to extract truthful advice while also maintaining the dignity that secures his position. If a prince heeds all advice, then he gains a reputation for weakness, which earns him hatred. Interestingly, a prince must maintain his standing above the masses or else incur their disrespect and scorn.

As a solution, Machiavelli suggests that a ruler "adopt a middle way," choosing able advisors and "allowing only those [men] the freedom to speak the truth to him, and then only concerning matters in which he asks their opinion." Rulers should question their advisors thoroughly and rigorously and listen to their opinions. An able prince will encourage his ministers to speak freely in his presence. However, when it comes to making a decision, a prince should "make up his own mind, by himself." Aside from his ministers, a ruler "should heed no one" and he should put the agreed policies into effect "straight away," adhering to them closely.

As in other matters, Machiavelli urges rulers to opt for moderation, striking a balance between alternative courses of action. A prince must ensure that he receives truthful advice from his ministers, but he must firmly set the guidelines for this exchange of opinions. To secure his position, a prince must make his final decisions independently, forcefully enacting his laws and policies. A prince must know when to listen and when to act.

Machiavelli offers a "modern illustration" of this principle, citing Maximilian, the Holy Roman Emperor, who "never [consults] anybody and never [does] things as he wanted to." Machiavelli writes that Maximilian, a "secretive man," never tells his advisors of his plans and "accepts no advice." As a result, when he puts his plans into effect, they "meet with opposition from those around him; and then he is too easily diverted from his purpose." Thus, his plans are never clear and "no reliance can be placed on his decisions."

With this example, Machiavelli explains that princes must endeavor to include their ministers in their decision-making process. A ruler must possess the prowess to balance his ministers' counsel with his own opinions and instincts. A prince who avoids advice and guards his plans too secretively risks weakening his state, since confusion will distract from his policies.

Therefore, a ruler must "never lack for advice," although he must "take it when he wants to, not when others want him to." A prince "must listen patiently to the truth" when he asks for it, acting as a "constant questioner." Machiavelli adds, "If he [a ruler] finds that anyone for some reason holds the truth back he must show his wrath."

A ruler must have the prowess to set firm but reasonable guidelines for the actions and advice of his ministers. An able ruler is a "constant questioner," although once he reaches a decision, he must resolutely adhere to his policy.

Machiavelli declares a universal rule: "A prince who is not himself wise cannot be well advised, unless he happens to put himself in the hands of one individual who looks after all his affairs and is an extremely shrewd man." Machiavelli states that the latter scenario is unlikely, since "the man who governs" for the unwise prince "would soon deprive him of his state." Furthermore, a prince who seeks the advice of more than one minister and is not himself wise "will never get unanimity in his councils or be able to reconcile their views." In this situation, an unwise prince will similarly come to ruin. Therefore, because men "will always do badly by you unless they are forced to be virtuous," the value of advice rests on the intelligence of the prince who asks for it, and not the other way around.

A prince must possess wisdom in order to appreciate and apply the wisdom of his ministers. Lacking prowess, a prince will face betrayal at the hands of his more cunning advisors. To govern, a prince must have the ability to synthesize the varied advice of his ministers, managing councils and helping them, if possible, to reach consensus. Rulers must use this fox-like cunning as a safeguard against the unvirtuous and self-serving actions of others. With his cynical view of human nature, Machiavelli expresses the inevitability of such unvirtuous behavior.

CHAPTER 24

Machiavelli opens by stating that a new prince who "carefully observes" the rules that Machiavelli has outlined will "quickly become more safe and secure in his government than if he had been ruling his state for a long time." Machiavelli writes that new rulers' actions garner more attention than those of their hereditary counterparts. If a new prince's actions "are marked by prowess," then they will "win men over and capture their allegiance" far more than "royal blood," owing to the fact that people are "won over by the present" more than the past. Wise new princes can achieve a "twofold glory" in both founding a new principality and fortifying it with "good laws, sound defenses, reliable allies, and inspiring leadership." Conversely, a hereditary prince who "loses his state through incompetence is shamed twice over."

Prowess forms the cornerstone of a prince's rule, providing him with stability and security and guarding against the unpredictability of fortune. This indispensable tool allows a prince to win over the people, who, because they have a short collective memory, care more about the present than the past. Armed with prowess, a new prince can win great prestige through the dangerous but honorable work of state-building. A new prince must diligently work to "capture" the people's allegiance, since the masses hold the key to a new ruler's success or failure.

Machiavelli turns to a consideration of modern Italian rulers, such as the king of Naples and Ludovico, the duke of Milan, who recently lost their states. Machiavelli declares that all of these deposed rulers shared "a common weakness in regard to their military organizations." Secondly, many of them "incurred the hostility of the people" or, if they allied themselves with their subjects, failed to retain the loyalty of the nobles. Machiavelli again reiterates the importance of maintaining an able army, citing the militaristic Philip of Macedon's resistance against the Roman empire.

Machiavelli reiterates that ignorance in the art of war inevitably results in the loss of one's state. A ruler who lacks military prowess leaves his state in the hands of fate. Some recent Italian rulers have made the critical error of earning the people's hatred, while others have failed to adequately balance the interests of the masses and the nobles. Above all else, Machiavelli again emphasizes the importance of able (i.e., native) arms.

Machiavelli concludes that these deposed Italian princes, whose "power had been established many years," cannot "blame fortune for their losses." Rather, their own inaction "was to blame." Because these rulers never anticipated difficulties, when adversity arrived "their first thoughts were of flight and not of resistance." These unwise princes neglected precautions in the hope that their people, dissatisfied with the conquerors, would reinstate them. Machiavelli asserts that this strategy was misguided and "cowardly." He declares, "The only sound, sure, and enduring methods of defense are those based on your own actions and prowess."

A lack of prowess, not fortune, caused the downfall of these Italian rulers. Failing to guard against the unpredictability of fortune, these princes were left defenseless when conflict inevitably arrived. These rulers misguidedly placed their hopes solely in their people, failing to take the necessary steps to ensure their people's dependence or to enhance their own prowess. While popular support is critical, a prince must also secure his rule with his own prowess and actions.

CHAPTER 25

Discussing fortune, Machiavelli states that many believe that events "are controlled by fortune and by God in such a way" that men's actions cannot possibly influence the course of history. Machiavelli explains that this opinion is "widely held in our own times," leading people to "submit to the rulings of chance." Machiavelli concedes that he himself has sometimes shared this belief. However, seeking a theory that includes "free will," Machiavelli states his conviction that "fortune is the arbiter of half the things we do, leaving the other half or so to be controlled by ourselves." Machiavelli compares fortune to "one of those violent rivers," which floods the countryside and destroys everything in its path. Over the years, people have learned to take "precautions" against future floods while rivers are flowing quietly, building "dykes and embankments" to limit rivers' destructive potential. Machiavelli urges rulers to approach fortune in a similar manner.

Notably, Machiavelli refuses the idea that all events "are controlled by fortune and by God," instead arguing that men influence about half of their fate. While Machiavelli acknowledges the power of chance, he limits the impact of fortune and God, a bold but rational statement that hints at his humanist roots. Machiavelli's theory, which evenly divides influence between fortune and "free will," fits with his other statements regarding the union of opposites. Machiavelli urges rulers to take precautions against the unpredictability of fortune, doing their best to prepare for unforeseeable calamities. A prince must fortify his state with legal and military "embankments."

Machiavelli asserts that Italy "is a country without embankments and without dykes," to which he attributes her present problems. If Italy "had been adequately reinforced, like Germany, Spain, and France," then the floods that currently torment it would not have proved so destructive.

While it is impossible to keep rivers from flooding, one can take steps to lessen their destructive power. Machiavelli chides Italian rulers who failed to guard their states against inevitable changes in fortune.

Analyzing fortune in more specific circumstances, Machiavelli declares, "Those princes who are utterly dependent on fortune come to grief when their fortune changes." A ruler who can adapt "his policy to the times" will prosper, while a ruler whose policy "clashes with the demands of the times" will fail. Machiavelli discusses the various ways in which princes attempt to achieve their goals, some acting with "circumspection" and patience and others proceeding "impetuously" with violence or stratagem. Despite "this diversity of method," Machiavelli asserts that all can reach their objectives, given the proper circumstances. On the other hand, two similar rulers, depending on variances in their situations, can arrive at two different outcomes, one achieving success and the other failure. According to Machiavelli, "This results from nothing else except the extent to which their methods are or are not suited to the nature of the times."

Machiavelli again emphasizes that rulers should not rely entirely on fortune for the continuance of their rule. Rather, princes must adapt their policies and methods to their specific situations. As he argued with regard to virtue and vice, Machiavelli declares that a prince's personal qualities will bring him success or failure depending on the circumstances in which he uses them. What functions as a princely virtue may become a princely vice if applied to an unfavorable situation. As much as possible, Machiavelli urges rulers to guard against changes in fortune by tailoring their policy "to the times." To survive, a prince must be agile and learn to carefully assess the character of his era.

Machiavelli declares that "prosperity is ephemeral" because rulers succeed or fail to the extent that their individual prowess and the demands of the times coincide. If circumstances change and a ruler does not modify his behavior, then he can expect to meet ruin. However, Machiavelli cautions, "Nor do we find any man shrewd enough to know how to adapt his policy in this way; either because he cannot do otherwise than what is in character or because, having always prospered by proceeding one way, he cannot persuade himself to change."

Rulers prosper when fortune and their prowess align. These forces must work in concert for a ruler to succeed. While Machiavelli advises rulers to adapt their methods to fortune, he nonetheless states that this is a nearly impossible deed. Machiavelli argues that men cannot easily act out of character, exchanging virtues and vices as the times dictate. A ruler who loses good fortune will most likely come to grief.

Machiavelli introduces the modern example of Pope Julius II, who "was impetuous in everything." Because "he found the time and circumstances so favorable to his way of proceeding," he always achieved success. Machiavelli cites Julius' first campaign against Bologna, which succeeded because Julius' impulsive invasion caught the Spanish and Venetians off guard and prompted France to rashly enter the fray on the papacy's side. If Julius had delayed his decision, he never would have succeeded, since the Spanish, Venetians, and French would have had time to prepare for and counteract his actions. The "brevity" of Julius' papal reign "did not let him experience" circumstances that opposed impetuous behavior. However, if times had changed in favor of "circumspection," then Julius certainly "would have come to grief," since he "would never have acted other than in character."

Discussing the "impetuous" and rash behavior of Julius II, Machiavelli demonstrates the prosperity of rulers whose fortune and prowess coincide. With fortune and prowess on one's side, a prince can accomplish unimaginable feats. While fortune determines if a prince's talents will fit with the character of the times, a prince must nonetheless possess prowess to take advantage of such favorable opportunities. In Julius' case, impulsiveness functioned as a virtue, complementing his prowess. However, in another age with a different character, it may have ruined him as a vice.

Machiavelli closes by stating that since "fortune is changeable" while rulers are firmly set in their ways, princes will prosper "so long as fortune and policy are in accord." Machiavelli asserts his belief, though, that it is "better to be impetuous than circumspect." He attributes this to the fact that "fortune is a woman and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her." Continuing the metaphor, Machiavelli says of fortune, "Always, being a woman, she favors young men, because they are less circumspect and more ardent, and because they command her with greater audacity."

While Machiavelli concedes that rulers may succeed with a variety of different virtuous and unvirtuous methods, he recommends rashness over cautiousness. Describing fortune as a woman, Machiavelli urges rulers "to beat and coerce her," compelling her to remain in their favor. It is worth noting that Machiavelli's metaphor here hints at the second-class status of many Renaissance women, who were often regarded as property.

CHAPTER 26

In his final chapter, Machiavelli considers the state of present-day Italy. Pondering whether conditions in Italy would favor a "prudent and capable" prince's efforts "to introduce a new order," Machiavelli affirmatively answers, "I cannot imagine there ever was a time more suitable than the present." Citing ancient examples of oppression, Machiavelli writes that Italy "had to be brought to her present extremity" so that its people could "discover the worth of an Italian spirit." Machiavelli states that it was necessary for Italy to endure "every kind of desolation," becoming "leaderless, lawless, crushed, despoiled, torn, [and] overrun."

Machiavelli declares that fortune now favors the introduction of "a new order" in Italy, welcoming the establishment of new legal and military institutions. Machiavelli argues that Italy's present ruin has spurred its people to reclaim "the worth of an Italian spirit." Machiavelli argues that the masses desire change, seeking the birth of a new Italian state. This emphasis on the people's wishes underlines the modern power of the masses.

Machiavelli cites an unnamed leader [Cesare Borgia] that some believed "was ordained by God to redeem" Italy. Nonetheless, fortune "rejected" Borgia. Thus, "Italy is waiting" for a ruler to "heal her wounds." Machiavelli expresses that Italians are "eager . . . to follow a banner, if only someone will raise it." Machiavelli contends that the country's greatest hope rests in the "illustrious House" of his dedicatee, Lorenzo dé Medici. Machiavelli asserts that the Medici family, "with its fortune and prowess," is "favored by God and by the Church, of which it is now the head." Machiavelli argues that the Medici can easily "lead Italy to her salvation" if they heed his lessons. Machiavelli states, "There is great justice in our cause," explaining that the people's support will render the task easier. While God will perform "wonders" to aid Lorenzo's effort, Machiavelli declares, "The rest is up to you [Lorenzo]."

Machiavelli flatters his dedicatee by suggesting that Lorenzo and the House of Medici hold Italy's "greatest hope" for the establishment of a new and unified state. Machiavelli describes the power of the Medici family, referencing Lorenzo's influential relative who currently serves as pope. With these critical allies, Machiavelli argues that the masses would support Lorenzo's effort towards unification, taking up arms under the Medici banner. These statements highlight the people's influential role in the establishment of new states and new princes. While fortune and God will provide one half of the aid, Lorenzo must use prowess to complete the task.

Machiavelli explains that earlier Italian leaders failed to bring order to the peninsula due to their reliance on misguided "old military systems." Machiavelli reemphasizes his previous point that "nothing brings a man greater honor than the new laws and new institutions he establishes," which earn him respect and admiration if they are "soundly based." Machiavelli argues that Italians "are superior in strength, in skill, [and] in inventiveness" when compared with other powers, although their armies "do not compare" to others due to "the weakness of the leaders." Citing recent military defeats, Machiavelli writes that all-Italian armies suffer from the lack of a competent leader who can "dominate the others by his prowess and good fortune."

Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to take on the dangerous but honorable work of establishing a new Italian state. With a strong foundation of new laws and arms, a united and prosperous Italy would bring Lorenzo and the Medici unparalleled prestige. Machiavelli highlights the "superior" character of Italian soldiers but laments many leaders' lack of military prowess. Machiavelli emphasizes the critical importance of skilled leadership, which makes use of both fortune and prowess.

To achieve honor and glory, Machiavelli declares that it is necessary for the Medici, "before all else," to create "a citizen army." Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of basing "our defense against the invaders on Italian strength." While Machiavelli concedes that hostile Swiss and Spanish troops present a "formidable" challenge, he argues that an all-Italian army could "be sure of conquering." Highlighting the faults of Italy's foes, Machiavelli declares, "The Spaniards cannot withstand cavalry, and the Swiss have cause to fear infantrymen who meet them in combat with a determination equal to their own." Learning from "the defects" of these forces, Machiavelli states that Italians can raise new armies and employ novel battle formations. These reforms would bring Lorenzo "greatness and prestige."

Machiavelli reiterates the value of native arms, which serve a ruler with unparalleled loyalty. Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to adopt new military tactics to overcome the scourge of foreign invasions and occupations. Military reforms and subsequent successes, based on the work of Italian soldiers and leaders, would bring Lorenzo great respect and earn him the goodwill of the masses. Machiavelli encourages Lorenzo to lead boldly, using arms and popular support to strengthen and expand his position. The unification of Italy would benefit Lorenzo and the masses equally.

In conclusion, Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to take advantage of this unique "opportunity" to unify Italy. Machiavelli describes the "resolute loyalty" and "love" with which Italy's "savior" would be rewarded. Referencing the "barbarous tyranny" of Italy's invaders and conquerors, Machiavelli asserts that Italians would greet Lorenzo's success with undying "allegiance" and "obedience." Machiavelli pleads, "Let your illustrious House undertake this task …. so that, under your standard, our country may be ennobled." Machiavelli encourages Lorenzo to fulfill Petrarch's prophecy of Italian resurgence. Machiavelli ends with Petrarch's proclamation: "For th' old Romane valour is not dead, / Nor in th' Italians brests extinguished [*sic*]."

Machiavelli urges Lorenzo to reclaim the greatness of Italy's past through the reunification of Italy. Machiavelli ennobles this modern effort by invoking the honored example of Roman antiquity, which Renaissance thinkers exalted as an ideal era. It is worth noting that while Italy had been unified under Roman rule nearly a thousand years earlier, Machiavelli's concept to unify Italy in his time was somewhat foreign to his contemporary Italians, who bore the scars of internal wars and divisions between city-states and regional principalities. Machiavelli asks Lorenzo to use goodwill and arms to reshape Italy at this opportune time, to return Italy to its former state of glory under the Romans.

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