**The Prince - Niccolò Machiavelli**

***General***

Title: The Prince

Author: Niccolò Machiavelli

1st publication: 1532

Read version: February 2006, The Project Gutenberg E-Book

Number of pages: 138

***Contents***

*Short summary:* Machiavelli composed The Prince as a practical guide for ruling (though some scholars argue that the book was intended as a satire and essentially a guide on how not to rule). This goal is evident from the very beginning, the dedication of the book to Lorenzo de’ Medici, the ruler of Florence. The Prince is not particularly theoretical or abstract; its prose is simple and its logic straightforward. These traits underscore Machiavelli’s desire to provide practical, easily understandable advice.

The first two chapters describe the book’s scope. The Prince is concerned with autocratic regimes, not with republican regimes. The first chapter defines the various types of principalities and princes; in doing so, it constructs an outline for the rest of the book. Chapter III comprehensively describes how to maintain composite principalities—that is, principalities that are newly created or annexed from another power, so that the prince is not familiar to the people he rules. Chapter III also introduces the book’s main concerns—power politics, warcraft, and popular goodwill—in an encapsulated form.

Chapters IV through XIV constitute the heart of the book. Machiavelli offers practical advice on a variety of matters, including the advantages and disadvantages that attend various routes to power, how to acquire and hold new states, how to deal with internal insurrection, how to make alliances, and how to maintain a strong military. Implicit in these chapters are Machiavelli’s views regarding free will, human nature, and ethics, but these ideas do not manifest themselves explicitly as topics of discussion until later.

Chapters XV to XXIII focus on the qualities of the prince himself. Broadly speaking, this discussion is guided by Machiavelli’s underlying view that lofty ideals translate into bad government. This premise is especially true with respect to personal virtue. Certain virtues may be admired for their own sake, but for a prince to act in accordance with virtue is often detrimental to the state. Similarly, certain vices may be frowned upon, but vicious actions are sometimes indispensable to the good of the state. Machiavelli combines this line of reasoning with another: the theme that obtaining the goodwill of the populace is the best way to maintain power. Thus, the appearance of virtue may be more important than true virtue, which may be seen as a liability.

The final sections of The Prince link the book to a specific historical context: Italy’s disunity. Machiavelli sets down his account and explanation of the failure of past Italian rulers and concludes with an impassioned plea to the future rulers of the nation. Machiavelli asserts the belief that only Lorenzo de’ Medici, to whom the book is dedicated, can restore Italy’s honour and pride.

*Long summary:* **1-2**. There are two types of states: republics and principalities. Machiavelli declares that he will not discuss republics, examining only how principalities may be acquired and governed. Principalities are inherited or new.

New principalities are either annexed to a ruler's existing territory or are completely new. New principalities are either used to being ruled by a prince or are used to being free. New principalities are acquired by luck or by strength. Hereditary principalities, which are used to being ruled by the prince's family, are easy to maintain, because tradition keeps the prince's position stable as long as he does not make himself hated.

**3.** New principalities always cause problems for the prince. People are willing to change rulers to better their own lot, but they soon discover that things have gotten worse, because a new ruler must harm those he conquers. Then you have as enemies those you harmed while seizing power, as well as those who put you in power, because you can never satisfy all of their ambitions. If conquered territories annexed to yours are similar in location and customs, it is easy to keep them, especially if they were hereditary principalities not used to independence. As long as you do not change their way of life, you need only wipe out the old ruling family to keep them. But if new territories are different in language and customs, they are difficult to keep. The best methods are to go and live there yourself, to establish colonies in them, to protect the neighbouring minor powers, to weaken strong factions within the state, and to guard against foreign powers. It is important to deal with developing political problems early, rather than wait until it is too late, because wars can never be avoided, only postponed. King Louis did not follow these policies in Italy and therefore failed to keep his territories. He also erred by making the Church more powerful, because to make others powerful is to weaken yourself.

**4-5.** All principalities are governed either by a single ruler assisted by his appointed ministers or by a ruler and the hereditary nobles who hold power in their own right and have the loyalty of their subjects. The Turkish sultan divides his kingdom into districts that are managed by his administrators, but the king of France has to contend with many lords who have longstanding privileges. Because the sultan's administrators are dependent on him for their power, they are not likely to help a foreign invader. But if an invader had a strong enough army to win, it would be easy to keep their territory, because the people are not personally loyal to the administrators. In a kingdom like France, the nobles are always ambitious and ready to turn against the king. But if they assist you in conquering the country, they will also be ready to turn on you. Even if you kill all the royal family, the nobles remain, and you can neither satisfy them nor get rid of them. Whether one can control a territory depends less on personal ability than on the character of the territory. If the conquered territory was formerly a republic, in which the citizens were used to living under their own laws, you must destroy it, go live in it, or let the citizens live under their own laws with a government that is friendly to you. If you do not destroy the city, it will destroy you, so fiercely will the citizens remember and long for their freedom.

**6.** The difficulty a new prince will have will depend on his ability. Private citizens become princes either through luck or through ability, but it is best not to trust luck. Those who become prince through their own strength have difficulty gaining power, but keep it easily. Establishing new states is always troublesome, because everyone who was happy under the old order will oppose change, and most people will not support new things until they have seen them work. The question is whether innovators must rely on others in order to succeed, or whether they can rely on their own forces. Armed prophets succeed, but unarmed prophets must fail. The people are fickle, and when they no longer believe in you, you must force them to believe.

**7.** Citizens who become princes through luck or the favour of others find it easy to acquire their states, but difficult to keep them. They are not used to being in command, and they have no armies of their own. Francesco Sforza became a prince by his own strength and kept his state. Cesare Borgia became a prince by his father's influence, and, despite his best efforts, could not maintain his state after his father's influence failed. This was not his fault, but was caused by extraordinary bad luck. Alexander VI wanted to make his son great, but had no troops he could rely on. Alexander allowed the French into Italy in exchange for the use of their troops to conquer the Romagna region. Borgia succeeded and made more conquests, but worried about the French king and the loyalty of his Roman troops, led by the Orsini family. He lured the Orsini leaders with gifts and promises of friendship, then killed them all. He won the loyalty of the people in Romagna. He had at first found the Romagna to be lawless, so he put Remirro de Orco in charge of restoring order, which he did well. However, Remirro de Orco was so cruel that everyone hated him, so to deflect bad feeling from himself, Borgia had him publicly executed. At this point Borgia had laid good foundations for his power. But abruptly Alexander died, and Borgia himself was extremely ill. Borgia then made a mistake by not preventing the election of a Pope hostile to him. In short, Borgia was a model prince and did all things well, except for his poor judgment about Julius II, which caused his downfall.

**8.** Continuing his theme from Chapter 7, Machiavelli discusses two other ways to becoming a prince: by criminal means or when private citizens choose a ruler from their fellow citizens. Machiavelli declines to discuss the first method at length, because it speaks for itself. Agathocles was wicked, but through his great energy became a military commander in Syracuse. In order to become ruler, he called the Senate and the leading citizens together for a meeting, and then massacred them. His ability made him a prince, but such conduct cannot be called virtuous. One can get power this way, but not glory. For example, Oliverotto of Fermo became a military commander and plotted with a few leading citizens to take over the city. His uncle arranged a lavish banquet to welcome him. On a prearranged signal, Oliverotto and his soldiers killed all the guests, including his uncle, and then terrorized the city into obedience. He was only removed from power when Cesare Borgia had him murdered at Senigallia. Cruel acts, though evil, may be justified when they are done all at once to establish a prince's power (but not repeated) and turned to the benefit of his subjects. Cruel acts are done badly when they increase over time. A conqueror should decide how many injuries he must inflict up front and do them all at once to keep his subjects from constantly resenting them. But benefits should be handed out gradually, so that people savour them. Above all, a prince should live with his subjects in such a way that no good or bad situation can force him to change his conduct.

**9.** When private citizens become rulers through the favour of their fellow citizens, these may be called *civil principalities*. One can reach this position through the favour of either the common citizens or the nobles, because the two classes are found in every city. The nobles want only to oppress the people, and the people want only to avoid oppression. From these opposing impulses can come three results: a principality, a republic, or anarchy. When the nobles feel pressure from the people, they try to make one of their own the prince in order to protect their privileges. When the people feel they cannot resist the nobles, they try to make a fellow citizen prince in order to protect their rights. You can never satisfy the nobles by acting honourably, but you can satisfy the people.

Regardless of how a prince comes to power, he should make every effort to win the good will of the people, or in times of trouble, he will have no hope. A prince must not delude himself about the reliability of the people, but nonetheless, a prince who makes good preparations and knows how to command will never be betrayed by them. A wise ruler will contrive to keep all his citizens dependent on him and on the state, and then he will be able to trust them.

**10.** One other measure of a state's strength is whether a prince can defend himself, or whether he must rely on the help of others. If a ruler can field his own army (either his own men or paid mercenaries), he needs no outside help, but if he must hide behind his city walls, he will always need help from others. The first type has already been discussed in Chapter 6, and will be again in Chapters 12 through 14. The second type has no option but to fortify his city and lay in supplies. If he has treated his subjects well and has made preparations, others will hesitate to attack him. The free German cities follow this practice with great success. Therefore, any prince who has a strong city and has not made his people hate him is safe. Some will argue that the stresses of a siege will make the people disloyal, but a wise ruler will know how to keep up their morale, as long as there are enough weapons and supplies.

**11.** The final type of principality to be discussed is the ecclesiastical state. Although this type of principality is gained through ability or luck, their princes stay in power no matter how they act. They do not defend their states or govern their people, and the people never think of getting rid of them. No other state could be so successful. Because these states are ordained by God, Machiavelli says he will not be so foolish as to discuss them. Still, some people may ask how these states became so powerful so quickly. Before Charles invaded Italy, it was controlled by five factions whose goals were to keep out foreign invaders and make sure no one faction became too strong. The short reign of most popes kept them from making any headway against these factions. Then Alexander VI appeared, and he showed what a Pope could accomplish with money and weapons. Though he wanted only to promote Cesare Borgia's power, he ended up making the Church more powerful, which Julius II took advantage of. One hopes that the present Pope Leo will make it as great by his goodness as others have made it by force.

**12.** Having discussed the different types of states in Chapters 2 through 11, Machiavelli now turns to how to attack and defend them. Princes must lay good foundations, and those foundations include good laws and good armies. There cannot be good laws without good armies, and where there are good laws, there must be good arms, so Machiavelli declares he will only discuss arms, not laws.

Arms to defend the state are the prince's own, mercenaries, auxiliaries, or a mix of the three. Mercenaries and auxiliaries are dangerous and unreliable. If a mercenary is talented, he will always be trying to increase his power at the prince's expense. If he is incompetent, he will ruin the prince. Only princes and republics that can field their own armies can succeed, for mercenaries do nothing but lose. Those who are well armed can live free. Machiavelli sites many examples of mercenaries who have turned on their employers. All this began when the Holy Roman Empire lost power in Italy and the popes gained power. Citizens took up arms against the nobles, and the popes encouraged them. Because neither the citizens nor the popes knew how to fight, they hired mercenaries. Soon mercenaries commanded every army in Italy. These mercenaries adopted strategies that kept them from hard work and danger, and this caused the ruin and humiliation of Italy.

**13.** *Auxiliaries* are troops sent by another ruler to help you. Just as with mercenaries, if they lose, you are ruined, and if they win, you are in their power. Auxiliaries come to you as a united body trained to obey others. Mercenaries are less dangerous, because they are not united behind their leaders. A wise prince would rather lose his own troops than win with someone else's, because a victory with borrowed troops is not really a victory. A principality that does not have its own army is not really secure, because it depends on fortune, not its own strength. Nothing is weaker than a reputation for power that is not based on your own strength.

**14.** The study of war should be a prince's main goal, for war is a ruler's only art. Knowledge of war is so vital that it not only keeps princes in power but can make princes out of private citizens. If princes become too refined to study this art, they lose their states. Being unarmed makes others contemptuous of you. No one can expect an armed man to obey an unarmed one. Therefore a prince who does not understand military matters will not be able to work well with his soldiers. Even in peacetime, a prince must concentrate on war by exercises and by study. Hunting is excellent exercise, because it strengthens the body and makes the prince more familiar with the surrounding terrain. A prince should always be asking himself how to make the best military advantage of the landscape.

A prince should also exercise his mind by reading the histories of great men and how they waged war, in order to imitate them. Great leaders have always tried to emulate the qualities of those worthy examples who preceded them. By studying their precepts in good times, the prince will be ready when fortune changes.

**15.** The proper behaviour of princes toward subjects and allies remains to be discussed. Many others have treated this subject, but Machiavelli bases his observations on the real world, not on an imagined ideal. There is so much difference between the way people should act and the way they do act that any prince who tries to do what he should will ruin himself. A prince must know when to act immorally. Everyone agrees that a prince should have all good qualities, but because that is impossible, a wise prince will avoid those vices that would destroy his power and not worry about the rest. Some actions that seem virtuous will ruin a prince, while others that seem like vices will make a prince prosper.

**16.** A reputation for generosity is thought to be desirable, but developing it can be dangerous. Generosity exercised in truly virtuous ways is never seen by others, so if you want to be thought of as a generous ruler, you must keep up a lavish public display. To support this habit, a prince must raise taxes and squeeze money from his subjects. Generosity of this sort benefits few and harms many. The prince's subjects will hate him, and no one will respect him because he is poor. Therefore, a wise prince will not mind being called a miser, because stinginess is a vice that allows him to reign. If a prince is giving away other people's property, he can afford to be generous, but if he is giving away his own resources, he will become grasping and hated or poor and despised.

**17.** Every prince will want to be considered merciful, but mercy should not be mismanaged. Cesare Borgia, by being cruel, restored peace and order to the Romagna. No prince should mind being called cruel for keeping his subjects peaceful and loyal. Punishing a few, and thus averting disorder, is better than allowing troubles to develop that will hurt many. New rulers cannot avoid seeming cruel, because their states are insecure. Still, a prince should not be too rash or too fearful. If you cannot be both loved and feared, then it is better to be feared than loved. Men are generally fickle, afraid of danger, and greedy. When a prince benefits them, they will do anything for the prince, but when trouble comes, they will desert the prince. People will break ties of love if it is to their advantage, but fear of punishment they will never transgress. A prince must be careful not to make himself hated, even though he is feared; to do this, he must keep his hands off his subjects' property and their women. People will sooner forget the death of a father than the loss of an inheritance. However, when a prince commands an army, he must be cruel in order to control his troops. In conclusion, people love at their own wish, but fear at the prince's will, so a wise ruler will rely on what he can best control.

**18.** Everyone knows that princes should keep their word, but we see that the princes who have accomplished the most have been accomplished at deception. A prince may fight with laws, which is the way of human beings, or with force, which is the way of animals. A prince should imitate the fox in cunning as well as the lion in strength. A wise prince should never keep his word when it would go against his interest, because he can expect others to do the same. In order to pull it off, you must be a good liar, but you will always find people willing to be deceived. To sum it up, it is useful to seem to be virtuous, but you must be ready to act the opposite way if the situation requires it. A prince should do good if he can, but be ready to do evil if he must. Yet a prince must be careful to always act in a way that appears virtuous, for many can see you, but few know how you really are. If a ruler conquers and maintains his state, everyone will praise him, judging his actions by their outcome.

**19.** A prince must avoid becoming hated or despised. Taking the property or the women of his subjects will make him hated. Being frivolous, indecisive, and effeminate will make him despised. All a prince's actions should show seriousness, strength, and decisiveness. The best defence against internal threats such as conspiracy is to be neither hated nor despised. If a conspirator thinks that killing the prince will enrage the people, he will think twice. Wise princes are careful not to antagonize the nobles and to keep the people happy. In France, the parliament restrains the ambition of the nobles and favours the people, without directly involving the king, so that he cannot be accused of favouritism. Princes should let others do the unpleasant tasks, doing for themselves what will make them look good. Some people may object that the careers of the Roman emperors go against this argument, because many of them were greatly admired, yet were still assassinated. This is because they had to deal with their soldiers, and they could not satisfy both the soldiers, who wanted warlike leaders, and the people, who wanted peace. Marcus, Pertinax, and Alexander were all compassionate and just, but only Marcus escaped assassination, because he was a hereditary ruler and did not owe his power to the army. Commodus, Severus, Antoninus, and Maximinus were all cruel and greedy, and only Severus escaped assassination, because he was so cunning and ruthless, and because he kept up a splendid reputation. But in Machiavelli's time, princes do not have the same need to satisfy their armies, because armies are not used to being together for long periods and controlling whole provinces, the way Roman armies were. Instead, princes should satisfy the people, who are more powerful.

**20**. Princes have tried various tactics to maintain power: disarming their subjects, dividing their subjects into factions, encouraging their enemies, winning over the suspicious, building new fortresses, and tearing down fortresses. New princes must never disarm their subjects, for if a prince arms his people, their arms become his. If a prince disarms them, the people will hate him, and he will be forced to employ mercenaries. Conventional wisdom says that creating factions is a good way to control a state. This may have been true when Italy was more stable, but not in Machiavelli's time. When factious cities are threatened by invaders, they quickly fall. Because rulers become great by overcoming difficulties, some believe that a prince should secretly encourage his enemies, so that when he overcomes them, his reputation will be greater. Some new princes find that those who were at first suspect prove more useful than others in governing the state. They are anxious to prove themselves to the prince. Those who helped the prince gain power may have done so out of dissatisfaction with the prior state, and the new state may also fail to please them. Princes often build fortresses to protect themselves from plotters and sudden attacks. If a prince fears his subjects more than foreign invaders, he should build fortresses. The best fortress, however, is not to be hated by the people.

**21.** Nothing enhances a ruler's reputation more than undertaking great conquests. Ferdinand of Spain's career provides a good example. He had attacked Granada; driven the Moors out of Spain; and attacked Africa, Italy, and France. These activities kept his subjects amazed and preoccupied, so that no one had time to do anything against him. With regard to internal affairs, princes should always find noteworthy ways to reward or punish any extraordinary actions. Rulers must never remain neutral. If neighbouring rulers fight, you must take sides, because if you do not, the winner will threaten you, and the loser will not befriend you. Whether or not your ally wins, he will be grateful to you. However, if you can avoid it, you should never ally with someone more powerful than yourself, because if he wins, you may be in his power. A prince should show that he loves talent and rewards it. He should encourage his citizens to prosper in their occupations. He should keep the people entertained with festivals at appropriate times. And he should give attention to the various civic groups, attending some of their activities, but without appearing undignified.

**22-23.** Choosing good ministers is vital, because a ruler shows his intelligence in his choice of the men around him. If a man cannot have good ideas himself, he must be smart enough to distinguish his minister's good ideas from his bad ones. The minister must think always of the prince, not of himself. The prince should honour and reward his minister, so that the minister will be dependent on the prince. Unless rulers are shrewd about choosing their advisors, they will find themselves surrounded by flatterers. The only way to guard against flattery is to show that you are not offended by the truth. But if anyone can speak their mind to you, you will not be respected. A wise prince will pick intelligent advisors and allow only them to speak frankly, and only when he asks for their opinions. He should listen carefully, but make his own decisions and stick to them.

A prince who is not wise can never get good counsel, unless he puts himself completely in the hands of a wise man; but such a man will soon take over his state. An ignorant prince who takes advice from several counsellors will never be able to reconcile their conflicting opinions, for each minister will think of his own interests. Men will always be disloyal unless a prince forces them to be faithful.

**24.** If a new prince follows all of these principles, he will soon be as secure as a hereditary ruler, because if people find they are doing well in the present, they will not look for changes. But anyone who acquires a new state and then loses it through incompetence is disgraced. The Italian rulers who have lost their states did so because they lacked military power, made their subjects hate them, or were unable to defend against the nobles. They should not blame bad luck but their own laziness for their losses, because they did not make preparations, and when trouble struck, they ran away, hoping the people would restore them. A prince can only rely on defences that he can personally control.

**25**. Many people believe that fortune controls everything, so that there is no use in trying to act, but fortune controls only half of one's actions, leaving free will to control the other half. Fortune can be compared to a river that floods, destroying everything in its way. But when the weather is good, people can prepare dams and dikes to control the flood. If Italy had such preparations, she would not have suffered so much in the present floods. Princes are successful one day and ruined the next, with no change in their natures. Two men may use the same method, but only one succeeds; and two men may use different methods, but reach the same goal, all because the circumstances do or do not suit their actions. If a man is successful by acting one way and the circumstances change, he will fail if he does not change his methods. But men are never flexible enough to change, either because their natures will not let them or because they become accustomed to a certain behaviour bringing success. It is better to be bold than timid and cautious, because fortune is a woman, and the man who wants to control her must treat her roughly.

**26.** There could not be a more appropriate time to welcome a new ruler to Italy. In order for the greatness of Italian spirit to be shown, Italy had to be humiliated first. Although it appeared a prince was coming to lead her, bad luck struck him down, so that she still waits eagerly for her rescuer. The Medici family can fill this role, if they will imitate the precepts Machiavelli has explained. Even signs from God point to their coming greatness. The other Italian princes never achieved this goal, because their old methods of warfare were unsound. There is no lack of courage or strength among the Italians, but their leaders are weak. For this reason, Italian armies have lost in the field for the last 20 years. If the Medici family want to become great leaders, they will raise their own armies. All the other European armies, despite their successes, have weaknesses that can be exploited with new strategies. Italy has been waiting for a saviour to liberate her from oppression by the foreign barbarians. Let the Medici take up the cause, and Italy will be great once more.

*Settings:* The Prince is written in 1532, this is also the time displayed in Machiavelli’s book. This is a time between the renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment. An era with a lot of regard science and literature and reason. Machiavelli is Italian and the book is set in Italy as well. But the book is not a work of fiction. There are no particular ‘characters’. It is a ‘political commentary’. He takes examples from the then current political and social events.

*Title:* the main question Machiavelli tries to answer in *The Prince* is how a principal can be an effective leader, and what he should do to keep his power. He provides the Medici family with advice on how to rule. The Medici were a very powerful and influential family in Italy.

***Characters***

Machiavelli does not use particular characters in his book, he does use a lot of examples, but not much is told about these people, and although these people have great histories of themselves, I did not feel as if they mattered as much in the point Machiavelli is trying to make.

As seen in this quotation from chapter XIV, he is using Sforza as an example/argument to show that ‘a prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline, for he would otherwise end up like the sons’.

*‘Francesco Sforza, through being martial, from a private person became Duke of Milan; and the sons, through avoiding the hardships and troubles of arms, from dukes became private persons.’*

***Form***

The book is told through the eyes of Machiavelli himself, it is a sort of letter. The author is not omniscient, and the book has a textbook-like narrative form. The story is told through telling and showing. Machiavelli gives his advice, but shows evidence with examples from existing princes and other rulers.

***Theme and moral***

The types of principalities:

Machiavelli lists four types of principalities:

* Hereditary principalities, which are inherited by the ruler
* Mixed principalities, territories that are annexed to the ruler's existing territories
* New principalities, which may be acquired by several methods: by one's own power, by the power of others, by criminal acts or extreme cruelty, or by the will of the people (civic principalities)
* Ecclesiastical principalities, namely the Papal States belonging to the Catholic church

The types of armies:

A prince must always pay close attention to military affairs if he wants to remain in power. Machiavelli lists four types of armies:

* Mercenaries or hired soldiers, which are dangerous and unreliable
* Auxiliaries, troops that are loaned to you by other rulers—also dangerous and unreliable
* Native troops, composed of one's own citizens or subjects—by far the most desirable kind
* Mixed troops, a combination of native troops and mercenaries or auxiliaries—still less desirable than a completely native army

The character and behaviour of the prince:

Machiavelli recommends the following character and behaviour for princes:

* It is better to be stingy than generous.
* It is better to be cruel than merciful.
* It is better to break promises if keeping them would be against one's interests.
* Princes must avoid making themselves hated and despised; the goodwill of the people is a better defence than any fortress.
* Princes should undertake great projects to enhance their reputation.
* Princes should choose wise advisors and avoid flatterers.

Italy's political situation

Machiavelli outlines and recommends the following:

* The rulers of Italy have lost their states by ignoring the political and military principles Machiavelli enumerates.
* Fortune controls half of human affairs, but free will controls the rest, leaving the prince free to act. However, few princes can adapt their actions to the times.
* The final chapter is an exhortation to the Medici family to follow Machiavelli's principles and thereby free Italy from foreign domination.

*‘Men ought either to be well treated or crushed, because they can avenge themselves of lighter injuries, of more serious ones they cannot; therefore the injury that is to be done to a man ought to be of such a kind that one does not stand in fear of revenge.’*

*‘When the duke occupied the Romagna he found it under the rule of weak masters, who rather plundered their subjects than ruled them, and gave them more cause for disunion than for union, so that the country was full of robbery, quarrels, and every kind of violence; and so, wishing to bring back peace and obedience to authority, he considered it necessary to give it a good governor. Thereupon he promoted Messer Ramiro d'Orco,(\*) a swift and cruel man, to whom he gave the fullest power. This man in a short time restored peace and unity with the greatest success. Afterwards the duke considered that it was not advisable to confer such excessive authority, for he had no doubt but that he would become odious, so he set up a court of judgment in the country, under a most excellent president, wherein all cities had their advocates. And because he knew that the past severity had caused some hatred against himself, so, to clear himself in the minds of the people, and gain them entirely to himself, he desired to show that, if any cruelty had been practised, it had not originated with him, but in the natural sternness of the minister. Under this pretence he took Ramiro, and one morning caused him to be executed and left on the piazza at Cesena with the block and a bloody knife at his side. The barbarity of this spectacle caused the people to be at once satisfied and dismayed.’*

*‘How one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live, that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil. Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity.’*

*‘Every one sees what you appear to be, few really know what you are.’*

*‘A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about.’*

A prince must appear as if he is faithful, moral and good. But he must also learn how not to be good and know when and how to crush his enemies. A prince must avoid hatred, for goodwill of the people is the best defence against aggression. Machiavelli states that what is ought to be done, is not what is done in the reality. One cannot remain in a high position by being good, for you will always be confronted with situations that force you to be evil. According to Machiavelli, a prince should not consider virtues and vices for their intrinsic moral value, but for their effect on the state.

According to Machiavelli, fortune directs half of our actions, but the other half is left for us to direct through hard work, cautiousness and virtue.

Machiavelli also thinks that people are inherently selfish. People admire honour, generosity, courage, and piety in others, but most of them do not exhibit these virtues themselves. ‘Ethics blind man from what the world really is’.

***Opinion***

*The prince* is an interesting book, the idea that this was written five hundred years ago alone, is already special. The ideas that are brought forward by Machiavelli, although I agree with them to a large extent, are quite pessimistic. But especially sceptical. I believe that if one would follow this advice, in combination with good qualities and talents, he or she would make it to the top. It might be different in this time and age, but because it is still such a well-read book, it might very well work out.

It is not a long book, but the use of words sometimes was a bit above my level. And I didn’t feel like learning all of Italy’s history, so a lot of the names that were mentioned, I did not remember.

I read in a review that this book is often read together with ‘The art of war’ by Sun Tzu, and as it so happens, I own that book. Although I haven’t completely read it yet, I might actually buy the Dutch version of ‘The prince’ and read them both, for it does really interest me.

Machiavelli states that people are inherently selfish, and this idea has gone through my head a couple of times before. Perhaps it is just me, but if you do something ‘morally good’, don’t you really just do it to feel good yourself? Don’t you do the same as the princes should according to Machiavelli: appear good, for it is all just a game of appearances?

Power and authority are weird concepts in general as well. Why would one person have reign over others? What makes people obey to a leader? In order to understand this book to its full potential, I must read the Dutch version though.

*Machiavellianism: [mak-ee-uh-vel-ee-uh n]*

* *Being or acting in accordance with the principles of government analysed in Machiavelli’s The Prince, in which political expediency is placed above morality and the use of craft and deceit to maintain the authority and carry out the policies of a ruler is described.*
* *Characterized by subtle or unscrupulous cunning, deception, expediency, or dishonesty.*