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HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

MACHIAVELLI
The Prince

Second Edition

This new edition of the acclaimed translation of Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* – revised for the first time after 30 years – includes a rewritten and extended introduction by Quentin Skinner. Niccolò Machiavelli is arguably the most famous and controversial figure in the history of political thought. *The Prince* remains his best-known work, and throws down a challenge that subsequent writers on statecraft and political morality have found impossible to ignore. Quentin Skinner's introduction offers a lucid analysis of Machiavelli's text both as a response to the world of Florentine politics and as a critical engagement with the classical and Renaissance genre of advice-books for princes.

This edition also features an improved timeline of key events in Machiavelli's life, helping the reader place the work in the context of its time, in addition to an enlarged and fully updated bibliography.

Quentin Skinner is the Barber Beaumont Professor of the Humanities at Queen Mary University of London.

Russell Price, who died in 2011, was Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Lancaster

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AND

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Editorial Note

When the original version of this edition was published in 1988, the division of labour between me and my co-editor, Russell Price, was as follows. I wrote the Introduction, and also compiled the Bibliographical Note and the list of principal events in Machiavelli's life. The translation was the work of Russell Price, who was also responsible for the annotations to the text, the Appendices, the Biographical Notes and the Indexes. He expressed his gratitude in our Editors' Note to Paolo Rossi for checking most of his translation, and to Francesco Badolato, Luciano Cheles and Michael Oakeshott for commenting on particular chapters. For further advice he thanked Bruna Isella and the Rev. Giovanni Rulli, SJ; and for help with correcting the proofs he thanked Harro Höpfl.

For this new edition I have rewritten the Introduction and produced a more extensive and up-to-date Bibliography. With an Anglophone audience in mind I have placed my main emphasis on books and articles in English. I need to stress, however, that some of the best recent scholarship on Machiavelli has been published in French and especially in Italian, and I have included some of the most important of these works. I am much indebted to John McCormick and Pete Stacey for enlightening discussions about recent trends in the scholarly literature.

Russell Price, who died in 2011, never proposed any changes to his translation, and I have generally resisted the temptation to tinker with it. But I need to note two exceptions to this rule. One relates to Machiavelli's chapter headings, which appear in Latin in the earliest manuscripts of *The Prince*. Some of Russell's renderings of Machiavelli's Latin can only be described as misleading, and I have tried to improve them. The other exception is due to the fact that some of Russell's

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translations of Machiavelli's moral vocabulary are rather free. It seems to me that, especially when Machiavelli is self-consciously challenging prevailing moral pieties, it is best to cleave as closely as possible to his exact turns of phrase. With this in mind I have ventured to re-translate several passages, especially in Chapters 15, 18 and 23. The edition on which I have relied in making these changes is Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Turin, 2013). I need to add a word about orthography. Machiavelli always speaks of *virtú*, but in modern Italian the word is spelled *virtù*. I have chosen to follow Machiavelli's usage throughout.

For commenting on my original Introduction I remain extremely grateful to Raymond Geuss, Susan James and Jeremy Mynott. For help with my new Introduction, and for much additional advice, I again owe heartfelt thanks to Susan James. I should also like to express my warm appreciation to the staff at the Cambridge University Press. I am especially indebted to Elizabeth Friend-Smith for encouraging me to undertake this new edition, and for continual assistance along the way. Many thanks also to Emma Collison for overseeing the process of production with great patience and thoughtfulness, as well as unfailing technical expertise. I also owe a great debt to Chris Jackson for subediting with such a marvellously vigilant eye.

Quentin Skinner

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Introduction

Niccolò Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469 and received his early education from a well-known teacher of Latin, Paolo da Ronciglione. After that, however, little is known about him until 1498. During the spring of that year the regime dominated by Savonarola fell from power in Florence. A new city government was elected, and Machiavelli was one of those who rose to prominence in the wake of the change. Although he appears to have held no previous public office, he suddenly found himself installed both as head of the second Chancery and as secretary to the foreign relations committee of the republic, the so-called Ten of War.

Machiavelli served the Florentine republic for fourteen years, during which he was sent on a number of diplomatic missions on behalf of the Ten of War. As secretary to these embassies he wrote a large body of official reports for the Florentine government, in some of which we already find him trying out a number of ideas he later developed in his political works. He also came into direct contact with many of the political leaders whose policies he subsequently analysed in the pages of *The Prince*, including Louis XII of France, Cesare Borgia, Pope Julius II and the Emperor Maximilian.

This formative period of public service came to an abrupt end in the autumn of 1512. In October of the previous year the pope had signed the ill-named Holy League with King Ferdinand of Spain. Entering Italy in the spring of 1512, Ferdinand's troops first drove the French out of Milan. Then they turned against Florence, the traditional ally of the French. Faced with the sack of their city, the Florentines capitulated at the end of August. The Medici family, in exile since 1494, returned to its

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position of controlling influence in the city, and soon afterwards the institutions of the republic were dissolved.

Machiavelli's personal fortunes collapsed with those of the republic. Although some of his friends managed to survive the change of regime, he was formally dismissed from his post in the Chancery in November 1512. A second and more terrible blow fell in February 1513, when he was falsely accused of taking part in an abortive conspiracy against the new government. He was tortured and imprisoned, and only regained his freedom when a general amnesty was declared in the following month, at which point he was allowed to retire to his farm south of Florence. From there, in December 1513, he wrote a famous letter to his friend Francesco Vettori about his new and isolated life. He reports that he has been making it bearable by studying ancient history, and at the same time pondering the lessons he learned in the course of his long years of public service. As a result, he says, 'I have composed a little book *On Principalities*, in which I delve as deeply as I can into this subject' (p. 91). The little book was *The Prince*, which Machiavelli drafted – as this letter indicates – in the second half of 1513 and completed by the end of that year.

The Prince opens with the observation that all forms of dominion are either republics or principalities (Ch. I). But Machiavelli at once adds that he will focus exclusively on principalities, concentrating on the best methods of governing and holding them (Ch. II). His primary aim, as his Dedicatory Letter explains, is to show the Medici how to govern in such a way as to achieve greatness. One of his hopes, he adds, is to win their favour by advising them on how this can be done. But his main aspiration – as he reiterates in the Exhortation that brings *The Prince* to a close – is to convince the Medici that, if they follow his advice, they will be able to bring honour to their illustrious family and benefit to the people of Italy as a whole.

As Machiavelli points out at the start of Chapter XII, the first eleven chapters of his book form a unity. He begins by distinguishing three types of principality, analysing the different methods of acquiring and holding them. First he considers hereditary principalities, but only to note that these pose few difficulties (Ch. II). Next he turns to what he calls mixed cases, those in which a ruler annexes a new possession to existing territories (Ch. III). This is where problems begin to arise, especially if the two principalities are in different areas and lack a shared language or system of laws.

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Chapter III is given over to contrasting the Roman way of proceeding in such cases with the methods recently employed by King Louis XII of France in attempting to hold on to his new possessions in Italy. The first and most effective policy, Machiavelli insists no fewer than three times, is for the ruler of such a composite kingdom to go and live in his newly conquered territories. Thereafter he must devote himself to undermining his stronger neighbours while protecting the weaker ones. The Romans always followed this strategy and never lost control of new provinces. But Louis has done exactly the opposite, as a result of which he has just been hounded out of Milan for the second time.

Newly acquired territories will either be used to living under a prince (Ch. IV), or else will be self-governing republics previously subject neither to internal domination nor to dependence on a foreign power, and hence accustomed to a free way of life (Ch. V). Territories of the former type are relatively easy to secure, provided that the previous ruler was someone who exercised total political control. But conquered republics are very hard to govern, for they always display 'greater vitality, more hatred, and a stronger desire for revenge' (p. 19). A new ruler must either destroy them completely, or else be sure to go and live there, while at the same time allowing their citizens to retain as many as possible of their previous laws and liberties.

Machiavelli next turns to the contrasting case of private citizens who become rulers for the first time. He surveys five different ways in which this transition can be effected, arguing that the obstacles a new prince can expect to encounter will largely depend on the manner in which his principality was first obtained. One method of becoming a prince is by one's *virtú* and the force of one's own arms (Ch. VI). Principalities are difficult to acquire in this way, but easy to hold once acquired. A second method is to gain power – as Cesare Borgia did – by good fortune and the armed forces of others (Ch. VII). Such rulers attain their positions with ease, but hold on to them only with the greatest difficulty. A third way is to come to power by crime (Ch. VIII). Machiavelli offers as his chief example Agathocles of Sicily, who seized control of Syracuse after butchering the entire senate. A fourth way is to be chosen as leader by one's fellow-citizens (Ch. IX). Princes of this type generally find little difficulty in holding on to power, provided they are able to retain the goodwill of those who originally elected them. Finally, in a deeply sardonic passage, Machiavelli notes that a fifth method of rising from

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the status of a private citizen to that of a ruler is to be elected pope (Ch. XI).

These classifications are presented in a self-consciously neutral and dispassionate style. When Machiavelli discusses the attainment of power by crime, he remarks that he will not enter into the merits of the case, since his examples 'should be enough for anyone who needs to imitate them' (p. 29). And when he ends by discussing the papacy, he treats that august institution as nothing more than one of the many principalities contending for power in Italy. Nevertheless, there is something deceptive about the way in which he lays out his case. Although he is careful to speak in general terms, the factors he chooses to emphasise suggest that at several points he is chiefly thinking about more local issues, and especially about the current situation in Florence.

This becomes evident as soon as we recall the position of the Medici at the time when Machiavelli was writing *The Prince*. After an exile of eighteen years, in which they had lived as private citizens, they suddenly found themselves reinstated in power in a city that had lived as a self-governing republic throughout the intervening period. Furthermore, their reinstatement was due not to their own *virtú* or popularity but to sheer good fortune combined with the foreign arms supplied by King Ferdinand of Spain. According to Machiavelli, they were thus in a highly dangerous predicament. Chapter VII is very emphatic about the difficulties encountered by those who suddenly come to power by luck in combination with the force of foreign arms. The most likely outcome is that their principality 'will be destroyed by the first chill winds of adversity' (p. 23). Chapter V had already argued that the danger will be still more pressing if the principality in question had previously been a republic. Whenever this is so, the citizens 'will never forget their lost liberties and their ancient institutions, and will immediately attempt to recover them whenever they have an opportunity' (p. 18).

A similar point can be made if we reflect on how the Medici conducted themselves in Florence during the years immediately after their return. Giuliano de' Medici, to whom Machiavelli originally dedicated *The Prince*, was at first sent to take control. But the head of the family, Pope Leo X, recalled him to Rome as early as April 1513. Giuliano's nephew Lorenzo, to whom Machiavelli rededicated his book after Giuliano's death in 1516, was thereupon sent in his place. But he too spent little time in the direct supervision of the city's affairs. He was absent from September 1514 until May 1515, and again for much of the

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rest of that year; he was absent again from October 1516 until the spring of the following year, and he died less than two years after that.

Throughout the period when Machiavelli was writing and revising *The Prince*, the Medici were thus behaving with what he regarded as the worst kind of imprudence. As we have seen, Chapter III had argued that Louis XII's failure to go and live in his newly conquered Italian territories was one of the most obvious causes of his losing them so quickly. Chapter V had added that, in the case of new possessions which have previously been republics, it is indispensable either to destroy them or control them at very close range. Once again, an undercurrent of specific warning and advice seems to lie beneath the surface of Machiavelli's text.

At the start of Chapter XII Machiavelli announces a new theme. Having discussed the various types of principality, he now turns to the figure of the prince. Unless a new ruler builds firm foundations he will always come to grief. But the main foundations of any government are good arms and the good laws they serve to enforce. The first and most basic topic to be considered must therefore be the prince's methods of defence.

Taking up this question in Chapters XII to XIV, Machiavelli has two main points to make. The first is that no prince can be said to have good arms unless he raises his own troops. And in speaking of *arme proprie*, as he explains at the end of Chapter XIII, he means armies 'composed of subjects or citizens or of one's dependants' (p. 50). This is one of Machiavelli's most basic convictions, and it underlies practically everything he says about the best means of gaining and holding on to power. Chapter VI had already warned that even the greatest *virtú* will never suffice to establish a new ruler unless he can also defend himself without the help of others. Chapter VII had laid it down that the first task of those who win power by favour or fortune is – as Cesare Borgia had recognised – to raise their own troops. Chapter XI had noted that, although we cannot enquire into the workings of the papacy, since it is controlled by a higher power, we can certainly ask why it has grown so rapidly in stature of recent years. The answer, once again, is simply that the popes have 'made it great by the use of force' (p. 41).

Machiavelli's argument embodies a frontal attack on the advice-books for princes that a number of Italian humanists had by this time begun to publish. Giovanni Pontano, for example, writing his treatise on *The Prince* in the 1490s, had asserted that any ruler who is loved by his subjects will never need to maintain an army at all. Machiavelli never

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tires of insisting that, on the contrary, sheer force is indispensable to the maintenance of good government. He not only makes this his central claim in his discussion of military affairs, he also reverts to the same topic in the last three chapters of his book.

These closing sections begin by considering the various rulers who have recently lost power in Italy, including the king of Naples and the duke of Milan (Ch. XXIV). Machiavelli declares that in every case their most damaging failing was their 'common military weakness' (p. 81). This makes it absurd for them to claim, as they do, that they have been the victims of sheer ill-fortune. The power of *Fortuna*, as Chapter XXV goes on to explain, is at most 'the arbiter of half our actions', and 'lets us control roughly the other half'(p. 82). The rulers of Italy have lost their states in consequence of lacking the kind of *virtú* with which Fortune can alone be opposed, and in particular the kind of military *virtú* needed for the successful defence of one's territories. The closing Exhortation to the Medici echoes the same refrain. 'If your illustrious family, then, wants to emulate those great men who saved their countries, it is essential above all else, as a sound basis for every campaign, to form an army composed of your own men' (p. 87).

Machiavelli's argument is also directed against the prevailing conduct of warfare in Italy. With the increasing refinement of urban as well as courtly life, most princes had given up attempting to muster their own armies, and had turned to the employment of mercenary and auxiliary troops. Against this practice Machiavelli speaks out in Chapters XII and XIII with intense vehemence. Mercenaries are 'useless and dangerous'; the ruin of Italy 'has been caused by nothing else than the reliance over so many years on mercenary armies' (p. 42). Borrowed auxiliaries are even worse; if they are defeated, they leave you helpless, but if they win, they leave you at the mercy of the foreign ruler to whom they owe their underlying allegiance, so that 'with them ruin is complete' (p. 47).

The other main claim that Machiavelli puts forward about the military duties of rulers forms the subject of Chapter XIV. A prince must always think and act essentially as a warrior, and above all take command of his armies himself. This commitment again embodies a sharp break with the usual values of Renaissance advice-books. Consider, for example, Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, drafted a few years before *The Prince*. Castiglione recommends that, even among those whose profession is arms, warlike behaviour should be set aside in times of peace in favour of cultivating the arts and refinements of civilised life.

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Machiavelli grimly points to the consequences of adopting such an attitude: 'it is evident that if rulers concern themselves more with the refinements of life than with military matters, they lose power' (p. 50). He concludes in his most hyperbolical vein that a prince 'should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else except war and its methods and practices' (p. 50).

Following this discussion of military affairs, Machiavelli announces at the start of Chapter XV that one further question remains to be raised about the figure of the prince. How should he conduct himself towards others, especially his allies and his own subjects? Machiavelli's answer occupies him throughout Chapters XV to XXIII, after which he concludes (as we have seen) by reverting to the topic of defence. The intervening chapters undoubtedly comprise the most sensational sections of *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli mounts an epoch-making attack on classical and humanist views about the moral virtues and their place in political life.

Chapter XV begins by noting that 'many people have written about this subject' (p. 53). It seems likely that Machiavelli partly has in mind the advice-books for rulers and citizens produced by such prominent humanists of the previous generation as Francesco Patrizi, Giovanni Pontano and Bartolomeo Sacchi. As he subsequently makes clear, however, he is also thinking of a number of ancient works to which these writers owed their deepest intellectual debt. The most influential included Seneca's *De clementia* and above all Cicero's *De officiis*, whose precepts were frequently copied out by Renaissance moralists virtually word-for-word. While alluding to these authorities, however, Machiavelli immediately alerts us to the fact that his own analysis will repudiate this entire tradition of thought. 'I fear that I may be thought presumptuous, for what I have to say differs from the precepts offered by others, especially on this matter' (p. 53). The reason, he adds, is that he finds existing discussions about statecraft wholly unrealistic, and hopes to say something useful by attempting instead to 'consider what happens in fact' (p. 53).

What happens in fact is that, whenever rulers are discussed, they are described as having a range of qualities for which they are either praised or blamed. Some are held to be generous, others miserly; some cruel, others humane; some untrustworthy, others faithful to their word – and so on in an extensive list of princely vices and virtues. Turning to scrutinise these qualities one by one, Machiavelli registers two rather

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different doubts about them, both of which are initially addressed in Chapter XV. He first suggests that, although a number of the attributes for which rulers are praised are regarded as good qualities, they sometimes only appear to be virtues. The language of virtue has become subject to so much rhetorical manipulation that nowadays some of what are *tenuto* or held to be virtues are really vices, while some of what are held to be vices are really virtues.

Machiavelli first argues this claim in relation to the virtue of liberality, the subject of Chapter XVI. To gain a public reputation for liberality, a prince will have to consume all his resources in ostentatious display. So he will end up in the paradoxical position of having to load his subjects with additional taxes in order to sustain his reputation as a generous man. A ruler who refuses to act in this way will at first be condemned as a miser, but in course of time he will come to seem a man of more genuine liberality. The elusive truth that princes need to grasp is that those who are nowadays held to possess the virtue of *liberalità* are usually indulging in the vice of *suntuosità* or extravagance.

A similar paradox is explored in Chapter XVII, in which Machiavelli discusses cruelty and mercifulness. He begins by reflecting on the conduct of the Florentines during the riots at Pistoia in 1501, a crisis that he himself had been sent to investigate as secretary to the Ten of War. Wishing to avoid any accusation of cruelty, the Florentines refused to punish the leaders of the factions involved. The result was that the disturbances turned into a general massacre. It would have been more genuinely merciful, Machiavelli insists, if the Florentines had instead made an example of the ringleaders at the outset, even though this would have led to accusations of cruelty. While the Florentines praised themselves for their merciful restraint, they ought instead to have condemned themselves for exhibiting *troppa pietà*, mere overindulgence. Still more controversially, Machiavelli goes on to question the reputation of Scipio Africanus, a leader usually celebrated for his clemency. When one of his legates sacked the city of Locri, Scipio refused to avenge the citizens or punish the legate, all in the name of avoiding any accusation of cruelty. Machiavelli protests that this was not an instance of clemency at all; rather, it was a further example of *troppa pietà*, stemming in this case from Scipio's *natura facile*, his lax character.

The other doubt that Machiavelli initially registers in Chapter XV about the princely virtues is a more radical one. He concedes that it would be praiseworthy if rulers possessed and exercised all the qualities

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generally held to be good, but he immediately pronounces that this is simply impossible. 'Because there is such a great distance between how we live and how we ought to live, anyone who sets aside what is done for what ought to be done learns more quickly what will ruin him rather than preserve him, since a man who wishes to make a profession of doing good in all things will come to ruin among many who are not good' (p. 53). A ruler who wishes to uphold his position must consequently learn 'to be able to be not good, and to use that ability or not use it according to necessity' (p. 53). The fundamental duty of any ruler is *mantenere lo stato*, to maintain his state, and he must act in accordance with what is dictated by necessity for the attainment of that end.

Machiavelli first comments on the implications of this belief in his discussion of liberality in Chapter XVI. Cicero had opened his analysis of this virtue in *De officiis* by declaring that nothing more befits the nature of man (I. 14. 42). Machiavelli begins by countering that, even if liberality is the name of a virtue, it can nevertheless do you great harm. Cicero had gone on to argue that the least suspicion of miserliness or avarice ought always to be avoided (II. 17. 58; II. 18. 64). Machiavelli replies that a wise prince will never mind being called miserly; he will recognise that it is one of the vices without which he cannot hope to sustain his rule. Cicero repeatedly affirms that a reputation for liberality in a leader always wins the affections of the people, whereas everyone hates those who discourage generosity (II. 18. 63). Machiavelli retorts that it is the practice of generosity, not its discouragement, that eventually brings a prince hatred and contempt. Confronting theory with practice – as he frequently does in these chapters – he observes in summary that 'those rulers who have achieved great things in our own times have all been considered mean; all the others have failed' (p. 55).

Next Machiavelli turns in Chapter XVII to illustrate his argument with reference to the vice of cruelty. The classic analysis of this evil, Seneca's *De clementia*, had denounced it as the most obvious characteristic of tyrants, and hence as the failing most of all to be avoided by virtuous princes (I. 26). Machiavelli responds that a wise ruler will never mind being called cruel for any action that has the effect of keeping his subjects united and loyal. The accepted image of the true prince, one chiefly derived from Seneca's famous account, had pictured such a ruler as someone who avoids cruelty even when it might be expedient to embrace it. But Machiavelli contends that it is impossible for a ruler to

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avoid a reputation for cruelty if he wishes to maintain his state, and that 'a new ruler, in particular, cannot avoid being considered harsh' (p. 57).

Later in the same chapter Machiavelli examines the related dispute that arises, as he says, when one asks whether it is better for a prince to be loved or feared. Here he alludes directly to Cicero's discussion in *De officiis*, II. 7. 23–4, in which he had considered how to establish and secure power over others. To banish fear and hold fast to love, Cicero had proclaimed, offers the best means to promote our influence and safety at the same time. Machiavelli reacts with an outright contradiction: 'it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved' (p. 57). Cicero had gone on to warn that there is no power so great that it can hope to last if it is upheld by fear (II. 7. 25). Machiavelli counters that, because men are excessively self-interested, they will break the bonds of love whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves, whereas 'fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective' (p. 58).

Finally Machiavelli turns in Chapter XVIII to the virtue of justice, and more specifically to the value of keeping one's promises. Cicero in *De officiis* had treated it as axiomatic that *fides* – the honouring of one's word – constitutes the foundation of justice, summarising his commitment in the maxim *fides conservanda*, that promises must always be kept (I. 7. 23; I. 13. 39). Machiavelli responds by asking, in the title of Chapter XVIII, the shocking question *Quomodo fides a principibus sit servanda* – how far, or in what way, should rulers keep their promises? He answers that 'a prudent ruler cannot keep his word, nor should he, when such fidelity would damage him'. This advice, he goes on, 'would not be good if all men were good; but because they are treacherous and will not observe their promises to you, you need not observe your promises to them' (p. 60). Confronting theory with practice once again, he adds that 'in our times the rulers who have done great things have held the keeping of their word of little account' (p. 59).

As Machiavelli develops this critique of classical humanism, it becomes increasingly evident that it is underpinned by a darkly pessimistic view of human nature. As he suddenly bursts out in Chapter XVII, 'this may be said of men generally: they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners and dissemblers, avoiders of danger, eager for gain' (p. 57). This perception in turn controls Machiavelli's handling of a further issue much discussed in Renaissance advice-books for princes, that of how rulers should conduct themselves towards their counsellors and the ministers in

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their government. Cicero had provided a much-quoted description in *De officiis* of the qualities that make citizens worthy to occupy such positions of trust. They must be ready to devote themselves entirely to their country's interests, and must never seek power or wealth on their own behalf (I. 25. 86). Turning to the same topic in Chapter XXII, Machiavelli makes clear his scepticism about whether such counsellors are anywhere to be found. There is only one means, he insists, to keep your advisers honest and trustworthy. You must load them with so many honours and so much wealth that they come to depend on you entirely. This alone will ensure that they keep faith with you and avoid looking for even greater rewards elsewhere.

As well as focusing on the value of *fides*, Chapter XVIII reiterates in emphatic terms Machiavelli's fundamental doctrine that princes must learn how to make a virtue out of necessity. He does not deny that it is praiseworthy for rulers to live uprightly, and 'not deviate from what is good if possible' (p. 61). He adds that even if (or rather, especially if) a prince does not possess the qualities generally held to be good, it is indispensable that he should appear to do so, and must therefore be ready to turn himself into 'a great feigner and dissembler' (p. 60). But his pivotal claim is that, if a ruler is to succeed in holding on to power in a world in which most men are not good, he cannot possibly hope to act virtuously at all times. If he wishes to maintain his state, he will often find it necessary to act treacherously, ruthlessly and inhumanely. He must consequently be prepared 'to vary his conduct as the winds of fortune and changing circumstances constrain him'; he should 'not deviate from what is good if he can manage to do so, but know how to enter upon evil if that becomes necessary'(p. 61).

This commitment embodies two further and especially pointed allusions to the usual humanist pieties. The first is contained in the suggestion that princes must always appear to be virtuous, and must therefore learn how to dissimulate. Cicero had sternly warned in *De officiis* against assuming that true glory can ever be gained by vain displays or hypocritical talk. All such pretences fall to the ground as quickly as fragile flowers, for nothing counterfeit possesses any lasting qualities (II. 12. 43). Machiavelli satirises these earnest sentiments with evident relish. The truth is that 'men are so naive, and so much dominated by immediate needs, that a skilful deceiver always finds plenty of people who will let themselves be deceived' (p. 60). He cannot resist citing the recent pope, Alexander VI, as a perfect example. No man ever 'kept his word less', but

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'his deceptions were always effective, because he well understood the naivety of men' (p. 60).

Machiavelli's other and even more pointed satire is contained in his basic suggestion that rulers must cultivate two natures – a good one they must be sure to follow so far as possible, and a bad one to which they must be ready to turn when this becomes *necessitato*, necessary for the maintenance of their state. Cicero had already observed in *De officiis* that there are two ways of gaining one's ends. One is by argument, the other by force; the first is proper to men, the second only to beasts (I. 11. 34). Sharpening the distinction, Cicero had added that beastly methods, encompassing the use of fraud as well as force, are completely unworthy of men. Force reduces us to the level of the lion, fraud to that of the fox, and both must be avoided at all costs as unworthy of humankind (I. 13. 41).

Taking up Cicero's discussion almost word-for-word, Machiavelli begins by agreeing that there are indeed two ways of contending, either by laws or by force. He also agrees that the former method is proper to men, the latter to beasts. Then he springs his trap: 'but because the former is often insufficient, one must have recourse to the latter' (p. 60). This means that a prince, being committed to beastly methods, needs to know which beasts to imitate. Turning Cicero on his head, Machiavelli puts forward his celebrated advice: a prince will do best if he learns to 'imitate both the fox and the lion' (p. 60).

One way of summarising Machiavelli's fundamental doctrine would thus be to say that he puts forward, in effect, a new definition of what it means to possess princely *virtú*. According to classical and humanist moral theory, the chief qualities that enable rulers to remain in power and rise to glory are such virtues as liberality, clemency and a sense of justice. Machiavelli agrees that the term *virtú* names those qualities that enable rulers to attain their highest goals. But he disjoins the attributes of the *virtuoso* prince from any necessary connection with the conventional list of the princely virtues. For Machiavelli, a *virtuoso* ruler is someone who is willing to do anything dictated by necessity in order to maintain his state. The term *virtú* thus comes to denote that set of qualities, moral or otherwise, by means of which – by virtue of which – this outcome can be achieved.

Machiavelli continues, however, to mark a distinction between those princes who know 'how to be not good' and those who are simply bad by nature. His main example of the latter is Agathocles of Syracuse, whom

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he discusses in Chapter VIII when considering those who win power by crime. Agathocles possessed so much energy of mind and body that, without any help from fortune, he rose through the ranks of the militia and eventually seized control of the city, which he thereafter ruled unopposed. Yet Machiavelli insists that 'it cannot be called *virtú*' to act as Agathocles did; his methods were such as to gain him *imperio ma non gloria*, power but not glory (p. 30). The reason is that he was at all times 'appallingly cruel and inhumane' and performed 'countless wicked deeds' (p. 30). His use of cruelty was not dictated by necessity: it was endless and indiscriminate, a mere reflection of his wicked nature. This is why, for all his remarkable qualities, Agathocles cannot be regarded as a *virtuoso* prince or 'numbered among the finest men' (p. 30). The truly *virtuoso* prince is good so far as possible, and not good only when this is necessary for the maintenance of his state.

After anatomising the princely virtues in Chapters XV to XVIII, Machiavelli turns in Chapter XIX to a new, although related, theme. He opens with an observation that would have been familiar to most of his original readers from Aristotle's *Politics*. Surveying the causes of revolution in Book V, Aristotle had concluded that monarchies, and especially new monarchies, usually collapse when their rulers come to be viewed either with hatred or contempt (1312b). Machiavelli strongly agrees that a prince who wishes to maintain his state must avoid anything that will make him hated or despised, going so far as to add that, so long as he does so, 'he will have done what he should, and none of his other censurable faults will involve him in any danger' (p. 62).

As Machiavelli emphasises later in Chapter XIX, this contention can also be expressed in a more positive way. A ruler who wishes to preserve his power must ensure that the whole populace, nobles and citizens alike, remain respectful and content with his government. As we have seen, he had already warned in Chapter IX that, even when a prince is in some way chosen to rule, his only hope of securing his government will be to retain the goodwill of the people. He now makes that insight central to his argument. Princes who behave in such a way as to incur the hatred of their subjects need, as he puts it, to be 'afraid of everything and everyone' (p. 64). By contrast, 'wise rulers have always been very careful not to exasperate the nobles and also to satisfy the people and keep them contented', recognising that 'this is one of the most important things for a ruler to do' (p. 64).

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Armed with this precept, Machiavelli next deploys it as a means of determining what should be said about two topical issues in Florentine politics. The first, taken up in Chapter XIX, concerns the danger of conspiracies. This was certainly a threat that the Medici had good cause to fear. The Pazzi family had succeeded in assassinating Giuliano de' Medici in 1478, and Machiavelli himself had been arrested, as we have seen, in connection with a further plot in 1513. But the menace, he assures us, can easily be contained. Conspiracy is so dangerous that those who engage in it only do so if they think their action will be popular. It follows that the best shield a prince can have against conspiracy is simply to ensure that he never falls out of favour with the people.

The other topical issue Machiavelli addresses is whether princes should guard their territories with fortresses. This forms the theme of Chapter XX, in the course of which Machiavelli notes that, although the Sforza have built fortresses and the Florentines have used them to hold Pisa, the duke of Urbino and the Bentivoglio in Bologna have both preferred to raze them to the ground. Machiavelli offers his own judgement in his briskest style. If you fear the hatred of your subjects, you must certainly build fortresses. But even this policy cannot in the end protect you against popular discontent. Hence 'the best fortress a ruler can have is not to be hated by the people' (p. 73).

For Machiavelli, accordingly, the crucial question that remains is how to ensure that you retain the goodwill of your subjects. Aristotle had laid it down in his *Politics* that rulers generally come to be hated either as a result of confiscating the property of citizens or violating the honour of their womenfolk (1311a–b). The Roman moralists had added that, as Seneca puts it in *De clementia*, cruelty is another vice that always increases the number of a ruler's enemies and eventually makes him loathed (I. 8. 7; I. 25. 3). It is striking that Machiavelli completely ignores the latter argument. But it is even more striking that, in offering his own judgement about how to avoid hatred, he simply reiterates what Aristotle had already said. It is not difficult, he insists in Chapter XVII, for a prince to avoid becoming hated: 'this can always be achieved if he refrains from laying hands on the property of his citizens and subjects, and on their womenfolk' (p. 58). Chapter XIX adds the assurance that 'if the vast majority of men are not deprived of their property or honour they will live contentedly', so that the prince will then be left to contend only with 'the ambition of a few men, which can easily be restrained in various ways' (p. 62).

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Turning finally to the question of how to avoid contempt, Machiavelli again gives his answer in the form of an implicit commentary on his classical authorities. But at this stage he reverts to his more usual stance as a critic, invoking but at the same time largely dissenting from traditional patterns of argument. In one way he thinks it easier to avoid contempt than earlier writers had supposed. Aristotle had thought of contempt as chiefly visited on rulers who lead a life of debauchery and drunkenness. He had therefore counselled political leaders to behave with studious moderation in matters of personal and especially sexual morality (1314b). Cicero and his humanist followers had underlined the same judgement in a still more puritanical style, stressing that a life of decorum and temperance is indispensable for anyone engaged in public affairs. But Machiavelli can see no force in these arguments. It is true that, when he turns in Chapter XV to list the qualities for which rulers are generally blamed, one of the vices he singles out is that of lasciviousness. But he never takes up the suggestion that this is one of the weaknesses that can endanger political leaders, and when he refers to the range of vices that carry no such danger, the most he is prepared to say is that one should avoid them if one can, but that 'if one cannot bring oneself to do this, they can be indulged in with fewer misgivings' (p. 54). The classical ideal of decorum and self-control is dismissed with a shrug.

In another way, however, Machiavelli regards the avoidance of contempt as more difficult than had usually been supposed. This emerges most clearly from his handling of yet another standard question in the literature of advice-books for princes, that of how to deal with the insidious figure of the flatterer. One widely accepted view was that a prince should make it clear that he wishes everyone to tell him the unvarnished truth at all times. He should therefore present himself – as Seneca had advised in *De clementia* – as a man of affability, easy of approach and openly accessible to all (I. 13. 4). Turning to this issue in Chapter XXIII, Machiavelli points to an obvious danger with this policy. If everyone feels free to tell the prince whatever they like at all times, he will very soon lose their respect and become an object of contempt.

How then is contempt to be avoided? Machiavelli gives part of his answer in criticising the ideal of the affable prince in Chapter XXIII. No ruler ought to allow anything like complete freedom of debate; he ought to listen only to a few advisers, and ought to consult them only on topics he himself wishes to hear discussed. But his main answer seems to

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derive less from reflecting on the literature of advice-books than from observing contemporary rulers, especially the contrasting cases of the Emperor Maximilian and King Ferdinand of Spain. What makes princes appear contemptible, Chapter XIX asserts, is seeming changeable, pusillanimous and irresolute. Chapter XXIII adds that these are the abiding weaknesses of the Emperor Maximilian, who is so changeable that 'it is never known what he wants or proposes to do', and no one can rely on him (p. 80). By contrast, Chapter XIX argues, no ruler will ever be held in contempt if he can manage to ensure that all his actions 'display grandeur, courage, seriousness and strength' (p. 62). As Chapter XXI goes on to note, these are the great qualities of King Ferdinand of Spain, which is why 'he has become the most famous and glorious king in Christendom' (p. 74).

Machiavelli largely presents his ideal of the *virtuoso* prince as a positive and creative force. Underlying his analysis, however, there is a hint of Tacitean doubt. (Tacitus is the one classical moralist approvingly cited in *The Prince*.) Sometimes the ruler who is guided by necessity is pictured not as someone who uses his *virtú* to beat down the malice of Fortune, but simply as someone who successfully learns to adapt himself to political exigencies.

An early expression of this more sceptical outlook can be found in a letter Machiavelli sent to his friend Giovan Soderini in 1506. Nature, he suggests, 'produces different kinds of mind and temperament' by which we are all controlled. But times are varied and subject to frequent change. So a man who wishes to enjoy good fortune will have to be 'shrewd enough to understand the times and circumstances' (p. 96). Writing *The Prince* seven years later, Machiavelli repeats these observations virtually word-for-word when discussing the power of Fortune in Chapter XXV. He begins by reaffirming that a prince can only hope to attain his ends if he manages to relate his ways of acting to the character of the times. But he now adds the blankly pessimistic suggestion that we can never hope to encounter anyone so prudent as to be able to adjust their behaviour in the appropriate way. The outcome is that, for all the magnificence of the rhetoric in the Exhortation that follows, Machiavelli ends on a fatalistic note. Since our circumstances vary, while our natures remain fixed, political success is basically a matter of having the good fortune to suit the spirit of the age.

Machiavelli is often described as a cynical writer, but this hardly seems an apt characterisation of *The Prince* as a whole. Consciously shocking

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