A Princely Primer

The Wisdom of Machiavelli

By

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“No one can say where the bones of Machiavelli rest, but modern Florence has decreed him a stately cenotaph in Santa Croce, by the side of her most famous sons; recognizing that, whatever other nations may have found in his works, Italy found in them the idea of her unity and the germs of her renaissance among the nations of Europe.”

From translator W.K. Marriott’s introduction to *The Prince*

Excerpts from *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli from a translation by M.K. Marriott Courtesy Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org

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Introduction

I wrote this out of frustration. It was easy to find Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*, in several translations, and it was just as easy to find a multitude of books that study, explain, or riff on it. Aphorisms and maxims float around the Internet with the patina of authority: everyone says that Machiavelli said it, so it must be true. Unfortunately, what I was looking for did not exist, which is a primer to what Machiavelli said, why he said it, and the context in which it was meant.

Of course the definitive answer to these questions is the book itself, the acclaimed and reviled *The Prince*. Even the worst translations of it are fairly quick reads since the book is short. Depending on the font, footnotes, and wind-baggery of the translator, *The Prince* rarely clocks in at over 100 pages. When in doubt, return to the source, and so I did.

In reading *The Prince*, I was struck by the amount of textural history (a review of Louis XII of France's bungling of Italy, for instance) and the lack of pithy aphorisms appropriate for quoting at a party or on a bumper sticker. The Renaissance, for all the glory of its many polymaths, was not an era of brevity.

To recap: the book itself is short, concise, easy to read, and really, really boring.

I decided to go it alone. I plucked a number of Machiavelli inspired maxims off the Internet and out of the air; they are placed directly next to the section of the book that inspired them, along with a short explanation of the context. This is a guide for anyone who wants to study the lessons of Machiavelli's great political treatise but who does not have the time, patience, or wherewithal to suffer through the real thing. It is also a definitive answer to that nagging

question: *Did Machiavelli really write that?* (I expect academicians will denounce me as plebian, but those rarefied hothouse flowers can go back to parsing Plato's angels and leave the rest of us alone.)

At the very end you will find two important sections that I hope you don't skip: Machiavelli's biography, which I kept short (marginally plagiarized); and my own analysis of Machiavelli's moral framework (pure plagiarism, I assure you). Keep in mind that I wrote this little book for fun, and my (lack of) scholarly insight is a reflection of that (lack of) purpose.

Of course, if you are really inspired, I recommend *The Prince* in and of itself. It is a short read, after all.

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Notes

ON Study:

The advantage of reading T*he Prince* as opposed to a collection of pullouts (however brilliantly they may be organized, which is certainly not the case here) is that, in the original, Machiavelli provided a lot more than a few clever ideas. For example, the book lays out the nature of principalities and how to best rule the different types; excellent examples of mistakes actual (or legendary) rulers made, and why those mistakes were mistakes; and in depth analyses of political tactics. These can be suggested by a maxim, but never replaced.

Also, it has been said that you cannot read *The Prince* without also reading its "companion piece," *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius (Livy),* and unfortunately, I agree. It is much longer, more obtuse, and even more brilliant. The title to Book One, Chapter 5, should tell you something of its nature: "V. Whether the guardianship of public freedom is safer in the hands of the Commons or of the Nobles; and whether those who seek to acquire power, or they who seek to maintain it, are the greater cause of commotions." In many ways, *Discourses* is the textbook while *The Prince* is the study guide to 'Machiavelli 101.' Don't be in a hurry, but do get around to reading it eventually.

ON LANGUAGE:

1. Machiavelli divided the world into three classes: Ruling, Noble, and Everyone Else. The ruler is the Prince, to whom the book is addressed; the Nobility are the hereditary leaders of cities/nations, such as Dukes and Counts etc.; and Everyone Else is just that: all the merchants, bankers, guildsmen, farmers, peasants, etc. from all other classes. I have adopted the capitalized use of "the Prince," "the Nobles," and "the People" to signify the divisions. If used in the lower case (e.g. "nobles" or "people") then the term is meant generically.

2. I have used the terms "principality," "nation," and "state" pretty much interchangeably. Perhaps not good form, but convenient. Machiavelli used the word "principality" to refer to the lands and people that a Prince might rule; the word "nation" as we know it today was unknown to Machiavelli's world. Nationalism was in its infancy during the Renaissance, an era when feudal chiefdoms resided next to "free" Republics which were ruled by titled nobles. In that era, a King or Queen's power was absolute. It is helpful to remember that *The Prince* was written some fifteen years before Queen Elizabeth I of England was even born.

3. Chapter and Paragraph numbering were taken from M.K. Marriot's 1908 translation. It is considered a classic and is freely available from Project Gutenberg online. Mostly, it was free.

4. I have changed the spelling of words to modernize/Americanize them. Hence, "favour" is "favor" and "endeavour" is "endeavor" and "Switzer" is "Swiss." I will not apologize for it.

MAXIMS BY CHAPTER

The following are maxims/sayings which I was able to tie to a specific chapter and verse within *The Prince*. The maxim (in bold) is followed by a quote from *The Prince* that supports or explains it, which is then followed (in italics) by the exact location of that line and a short explanation of the context in which it was written. Read the entire explanation, because sometimes what the maxim may appear to say or endorse is greatly tempered by the context of the quote it was based on.

Avoid sentiment if it costs the affections of those you rule.

'…although one may be very strong in armed forces, yet in entering a province one has always need of the goodwill of the natives.'

Chapter 3, Paragraph 2 – Stating specifically why it is that you may not be able to place friends into high places in a captured territory, and also why you may not keep the friends already in high places in the territory for the same reason: you will need the "goodwill of the natives" at any cost. This is just the start of Machiavelli's admonitions on the matter of staying on the good side of the People.

Either Be Diplomatic or Be Devastating: avoid hurting anyone, but if necessary, do it so severely that they will not be willing or able to retaliate.

'...one has to remark that 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.'

Chapter 3, Paragraph 7 – Discussing the colonization of captured dominions as opposed to setting up armed garrisons. However this advice is general in nature; Machiavelli did not endorse brutality except as a means to keep the nation secure.

Protect and defend your allies, but do not allow them to strengthen under you.

'…the prince who holds a country…ought to make himself the head and defender of his less powerful neighbors, and to weaken the more powerful amongst them, taking care that no foreigner as powerful as himself shall, by any accident, get a footing there; for it will always happen that such a one will be introduced by those who are discontented, either through excess of ambition or through fear…'

Chapter 3, Paragraph 9 – On securing your political hold of a country. Do not forsake your power in order to avoid trouble, for trouble will come anyway.

Deal with your problems on your own terms, or someone else will make you deal with them on theirs.

'…the Romans, foreseeing troubles, dealt with them at once, and, even to avoid a war, would not let them come to a head, for they knew that war is not to be avoided, but is only to be put off to the advantage of others.'

Chapter 3, Paragraph 10 – On securing your political hold of a country. Whenever Machiavelli mentions 'the Romans' in a general way, it is with respect and admiration.

Those you assist to power will distrust the power you have.

'…that he who is the cause of another becoming powerful is ruined; because that [predominance] has been brought about either by astuteness or else by force, and both are distrusted by him who has been raised to power.'

Chapter 3, paragraph 18 – Concerning the ruin of France by Spain and the Church due to France backing them politically and in war; Machiavelli brings this point home regularly in various example throughout his works, though, and considers this fact of human nature to be a significant reason that those in power either fall from power or corrupt themselves trying to secure power.

Victory alone does not secure authority.

'…but if you wish to hold [the state after winning it], you meet with infinite difficulties, both from those who have assisted you and from those you have crushed. Nor is it enough for you to have exterminated the family of the prince, because the lords that remain make themselves the heads of fresh movements against you, and as you are unable either to satisfy or exterminate them, that state is lost whenever time brings the opportunity.'

Chapter 4, Paragraph 4 – On discussing how and why kingdoms are lost.

Take a man or a country's freedom at your peril.

'And he who becomes master of a city accustomed to freedom and does not destroy it, may expect to be destroyed by it, for in rebellion it has always the watchword of liberty and its ancient privileges as a rallying point, which neither time nor benefits will ever cause it to forget.'

Chapter 5, Paragraph 2 – An often overlooked chapter, it deals mostly with the futility and the folly of taking away the liberties of a free nation. Machiavelli held republics in very high regard and this is his gentle warning to all comers that holding such a principality is fraught with failure. Remember that at the time he wrote The Prince, *Machiavelli was still smarting from the fall of Florence and Pope Julius II's' re-instating the Medici princes as the rulers of that former republic.*

Aim high.

'A wise man ought always to follow the paths beaten by great men, and to imitate those who have been supreme, so that if his ability does not equal theirs, at least it will savor of it.'

Chapter 6, Paragraph 1 – On the best attitude for becoming a "new" prince of a principality.

Do not take your victories for granted.

'And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, then to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.'

Chapter 6, Paragraph 5 – On the need for force in establishing a new order in a newly acquired principality won through force of arms. Here Machiavelli discusses at length on the difficulty that a 'new order' will endure due to followers who preferred the old conditions and/or are uncertain of the new ones. Leading to the following phrase:

Carry a big stick, and swing it ruthlessly.

'Hence it is that all armed prophets have conquered, and the unarmed ones have been destroyed.'

Chapter 6, Paragraph 6 – Pretty self explanatory; Machiavelli was no man of peace, by any stretch of the imagination. However I feel that the reading does not support this aphorism exactly, as Machiavelli considered ruthlessness to be its own weapon, and big sticks to be over-rated.

If you fought for your victory, expect to hold it securely; if your desire is given to you, expect to fight to hold it.

'Those who by valorous ways become princes…acquire a principality with difficulty, but they keep it with ease.'

Chapter 6, Paragraph 5; and

'Those who solely by good fortune become princes from being private citizens have little trouble in rising, but much in keeping atop…'

Chapter 7, Paragraph 1

People injure others either from fear or hatred.

'For men injure either from fear or hatred.'

Chapter 7, Paragraph 12 – On the career of Duke Valentino, aka Cesare Borgia. Specifically on the matter of consenting to elect a pope he had previously injured or had cause to fear him. Machiavelli admired the Duke and used him as an example extensively.

Never assume you have been forgiven.

'He who believes that new benefits will cause great personages to forget old injuries is deceived.'

Chapter 7, Paragraph 12 – Further on Duke Valentino/Borgia.

If you must take strong action do it all at once. Incremental malice only gives your enemies time to respond.

'Those [severe tactics] may be called properly used, if of evil it is possible to speak well, that are applied at one blow and are necessary to one's security, and that are not persisted in afterwards unless they can be turned to the advantage of the subjects.'

Chapter 8, Paragraph 6, and:

'…in seizing a state, the usurper ought to examine closely into all those injuries which it is necessary for him to inflict, and to do them all at one stroke so as not to have to repeat them daily; and thus by not unsettling men he will be able to reassure them, and win them to himself by benefits.'

Chapter 8, Paragraph 7 This section concerns the gaining and holding of an estate or position through "wickedness". Machiavelli does not recommend it, commenting:

‘Yet it cannot be called talent to slay fellow-citizens, to deceive friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; such methods may gain empire, but not glory.’

Chapter 8, Paragraph 3

Take the high road, and your people will follow you there.

‘Because men, when they receive good from him of whom they were expecting evil, are bound more closely to their benefactor; thus the people quickly become more devoted to him than if he had been raised to the principality by their favors…’

Chapter 9, Paragraph 6 – from Lessons on a Civil Principality, this concerns issues on how to bind both (if possible) the Nobles and the People to you, and which is more important to retain if you can’t (the People). This is possibly my favorite Machiavellian-inspired aphorism.

Do not be deceived by the goodwill of others in tranquil times; for when adversity strikes, those with the most to gain will also strike.

‘Therefore a wise prince ought to adopt such a course that his citizens will always in every sort and kind of circumstance have need of the state and of him, and then he will always find them faithful.’

Chapter 9, Paragraph 7 – Here discussing the need to be wary of ‘magistrates’ (administrators, middle¬men) who might take advantage of discord to advance themselves; and also, to understand that the without a good foundation of loyalty, the Prince who is followed devotedly during peacetime will find himself alone in adversity.

Let your defenses be known, in order to deter your adversaries from engaging you in battle.

‘And whoever shall fortify his town well, and shall have managed the other concerns of his subjects in the way stated above, and to be often repeated, will never be attacked without great caution, for men are always adverse to enterprises where difficulties can be seen, and it will be seen not to be an easy thing to attack one who has his town well fortified, and is not hated by his people.’

Chapter 10, Paragraph 1 – Advice to those who do not have the power or the armed forces to meet an enemy in the field and so instead must fortify the towns; that is, how to make a defensive play successfully.

It is the nature of men to be bound by the benefits they confer as much as by those they receive.

'For it is the nature of men to be bound by the benefits they confer as much as by those they receive.'

Chapter 10, Paragraph 4 – On the wisdom of supporting and defending citizens during wartime.

Order follows stability.

'The chief foundations of all states, new as well as old or composite, are good laws and good arms; and as there cannot be good laws where the state is not well armed, it follows that where they are well armed they have good laws.'

Chapter 12, Paragraph 2 – This is part of an introduction to the chapter dealing with "soldiery."

Loyalty is not based on a paycheck.

'The fact is, [mercenaries] have no other attraction or reason for keeping the field than a trifle of stipend, which is not sufficient to make them willing to die for you.'

Chapter 12, Paragraph 3 – On the imprudence of relying on mercenaries as your army.

Do not let others be your strength.

'In conclusion, the arms of others either fall from your back, or they weigh you down, or they bind you fast.'

Chapter 13, Paragraph 8 – here Machiavelli is taking pains to explain why a prince should muster his own army, and not rely on mercenaries who will turn on him or auxiliaries (foreign armies) that will use him for their own ends. Also:

'And it has always been the opinion and judgment of wise men that nothing can be so uncertain or unstable as fame or power not founded on its own strength.'

Chapter 13, Paragraph 11

A good defense is better than any offense.

'Because there is nothing proportionate between the armed and the unarmed; and it is not reasonable that he who is armed should yield obedience willingly to him who is unarmed, or that the unarmed man should be secure among armed servants.'

Chapter 14, Paragraph 1 – In introducing the topic of why a prince must study the art of war.

Practice constant vigilance.

‘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 this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only upholds those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that rank. And, on the contrary, it is seen that when princes have thought more of ease than of arms they have lost their states.’

Chapter 14, Paragraph 1 –Self-explanatory, although the maxim itself was likely coined by someone else entirely in a different context, and only retroactively was it attributed to Machiavelli. I have no proof of such a claim, but quite frankly Machiavelli was never that pithy.

Rulers must live in the constant expectation of war.

‘A wise prince ought to observe some such rules, and never in peaceful times stand idle, but increase his resources with industry in such a way that they may be available to him in adversity, so that if fortune chances it may find him prepared to resist her blows.’

Chapter 14, Paragraph 4 – On the necessities of keeping your army prepared for war, studying the history of war and tactics, and staying fit.

The ends justify the means.

‘...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.’

Chapter 15, Paragraphs 1&2 – Machiavelli is explaining why he intends to ‘depart from the methods of other people’ in his advice as to how a prince should conduct himself towards his subjects and friends. This piece of advice is the main reason Machiavelli’s name has been dragged through the mud for centuries, and why his little tome of political advice has been dissected, analyzed, and even burned. For more on this, read my “Overview” at the end of this booklet.

Do what must be done, without regard to how it may look to others.

'And again, he need not make himself uneasy at incurring a reproach for those vices without which the state can only be saved with difficulty, for if everything is considered carefully, it will be found that something which looks like virtue, if followed, would be his ruin; whilst something else, which looks like vice, yet followed brings him security and prosperity.'

Chapter 15, Paragraph 2; and:

'A prince, therefore, provided that he has not to rob his subjects, that he can defend himself, that he does not become poor and abject, that he is not forced to become rapacious, ought to hold of little account a reputation for being mean, for it is one of those vices which will enable him to govern.'

Chapter 16, Paragraph 3 – Continuing the theme of "The ends justify the means": On the virtues of being liberal (with money) vs. being mean (cheap, or frugal). Machiavelli is saying that if you need to be a cheap bastard in order to keep the country prosperous, then bear the slings and arrows of the discontent; you have a higher moral calling than righteousness.

If your actions bring reproach upon you, make certain they don't bring hatred with it.

'Therefore it is wiser to have a reputation for meanness [frugality] which brings reproach without hatred, than to be compelled through seeking a reputation for liberality [squandering] to incur a name for rapacity which begets reproach with hatred.'

Chapter 16, Paragraph 4 – Machiavelli states that a prince must avoid being hated above all things, and this is advice on how to avoid it.

One must employ terrorism or kindness, as the case dictates, without regard to cultural, social and religious mores.

'Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are wont to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only.'

Chapter 17, Paragraph 1 – Advice on the value of being cruel, in certain circumstances, but always keeping in mind that one must avoid being hated.

It is better to be feared than loved.

'…friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.'

Chapter 17, Paragraph 3 – Here Machiavelli is discoursing on whether is it better to be loved or feared, and concludes that both are preferable, but where a prince must sacrifice one for the other, it is better to be feared.

You may excite fear but not hatred, for hatred will destroy you in the end.

'Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women. But when it is necessary for him to proceed against the life of someone, he must do it on proper justification and for manifest cause, but above all things he must keep his hands off the property of others, because men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.'

Chapter 17, Paragraph 4 – Further on the subject of being loved vs. being feared, yet again noting that being hated is ruinous to all.

Men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their inheritance.

'…men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.'

Chapter 17, Paragraph 4 – Because really, it does bear repreating.

Moral laws are not absolute.

'Therefore a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer.'

Chapter 18, Paragraph 1 – Citing the idea that man should avail himself to be both man and beast, as man is governed by law and beasts by force; and that because laws are often not sufficient, one must often have recourse to force. Therefore, one cannot keep faith on principle because no one will do so in return and you will put your kingdom at risk. Chapter 18 is considered by many Christian philosophers to be the most offensive of all of Machiavelli's writings, and this paragraph is a good reason why. Another is Paragraph 4:

"And you have to understand this, that a prince, especially a new one, cannot observe all those things for which men are esteemed, being often forced, in order to maintain the state, to act contrary to fidelity, friendship, humanity, and religion. Therefore it is necessary for him to have a mind ready to turn itself accordingly as the winds and variations of fortune force it, yet, as I have said above, not to diverge from the good if he can avoid doing so, but, if compelled, then to know how to set about it."

Note that Machiavelli does not endorse throwing fidelity, friendship, humanity and religion out the window ("do not diverge from the good…"), he is only stating that being true to those ideals in all situations will mostly likely bring about your ruin.

Use a person's gullibility to your advantage.

'But it is necessary to know well how to disguise this characteristic [of playing the fox], and to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are so simple, and so subject to present necessities, that he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived.'

Chapter 18, Paragraph 2 – Chapter 18 is considered the Heart of Machiavellian ideology: "Lie, cheat or steal to get your way." The essence of this teaching, however, is of a more cautionary tone than an evil one, with Machiavelli stating that being "of good faith" is noble but generally ruinous.

You may be violent and powerful, but do not break your own laws, for that destroys confidence and disintegrates society.

'It makes him hated above all things, as I have said, to be rapacious, and to be a violator of the property and women of his subjects, from both of which he must abstain. And when neither their property nor their honor is touched, the majority of men live content…'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 2 – More discourse on the importance of not being hated.

When you confer benefits do so yourself; but if dirty work is to be done, let others do it, for then they, not the prince, will be blamed and the prince can gain favor by duly cutting off their heads: for men prefer vengeance and security to liberty.

'From this one can draw another important conclusion, that princes ought to leave affairs of reproach to the management of others, and keep those of grace in their own hands.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 9 – On the importance of staying in his people's good will. Also:
'For this reason I consider that a prince ought to reckon conspiracies of little account when his people hold him in esteem; but when it is hostile to him, and bears hatred towards him, he ought to fear everything and everybody.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 8- Also reference Chapter 7, Paragraph 7, on the story of the unfortunate but well-used Messer Ramiro d'Orco.

Competition – divisions between classes – in a society is desirable, for it generates energy and ambition in the right degree.

'Among the best ordered and governed kingdoms of our times is France, and in it are found many good institutions on which depend the liberty and security of the king; of these the first is the parliament and its authority, because he who founded the kingdom, knowing the ambition of the nobility and their boldness, considered that a bit to their mouths would be necessary to hold them in; and, on the other side, knowing the hatred of the people, founded in fear, against the nobles, he wished to protect them, yet he was not anxious for this to be the particular care of the king; therefore, to take away the reproach which he would be liable to from the nobles for favoring the people, and from the people for favoring the nobles, he set up an arbiter, who should be one who could beat down the great and favor the lesser without reproach to the king.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 9 – I almost included this maxim under the "Bogus Maxims" listing because I do not feel it reflects the original text in spirit, but since the text can certainly be read in support of the idea, I have included it here. My opinion is that this passage was less about class competition for the sake of social stability than it is about deflecting unfavorable opinions/attitudes away from the ruler.

Avoid global hostility; it will create numerous and subtle enemies and only saps ones focus and strength.

'…as princes cannot help being hated by someone, they ought, in the first place, to avoid being hated by every one, and when they cannot compass this, they ought to endeavor with the utmost diligence to avoid the hatred of the most powerful.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 12 – Using the example of ancient Roman emperors, Machiavelli discusses how some were caught (and thereby brought down) in between the desires of the soldiers (for war) and the desires of the citizens (for peace).

All ethical and moral values are arbitrary artifacts from the cultures that set them forth. Political and military greatness is usually derived from ignoring them.

'And here it should be noted that hatred is acquired as much by good works as by bad ones, therefore, as I said before, a prince wishing to keep his state is very often forced to do evil; for when that body is corrupt whom you think you have need of to maintain yourself—it may be either the people or the soldiers or the nobles – you have to submit to its humors and to gratify them, and then good works will do you harm.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 14 – On how living a just, honest, and humane life will surely spell your downfall in politics. Machiavelli respects the Christian life of Godly morals, he just does not feel it is the best way to succeed in worldly matters of state.

The most dangerous enemy is one who is willing to be destroyed for revenge.

'And here it must be noted that [revenge murders], which are deliberately inflicted with a resolved and desperate courage, cannot be avoided by princes, because any one who does not fear to die can inflict them; but a prince may fear them the less because they are very rare; he has only to be careful not to do any grave injury to those whom he employs or has around him in the service of the state.'

Chapter 19, Paragraph 18 – On the murder of Antoninus Caesar by one of his own Centurions, after years of practicing cruelty and wanton murder on his own people.

Divide and be conquered.

'…because I do not believe that factions can ever be of use; rather it is certain that when the enemy comes upon you in divided cities you are quickly lost, because the weakest party will always assist the outside forces and the other will not be able to resist.'

Chapter 20, Paragraph 3 – General advice on how to hold a city.

Create a reputation for ruthlessness so that you may never have reason to use it.

'For this reason many consider that a wise prince, when he has the opportunity, ought with craft to foster some animosity against himself, so that, having crushed it, his renown may rise higher.'

Chapter 20, Paragraph 4 – Perhaps the first genuine self¬help marketing advice ever written in Western history. Machiavelli put a lot of faith into the idea that a Prince should develop a well¬oiled P.R. machine.

The love of the People is your best Fortress.

'For this reason the best possible fortress is: not to be hated by the people, because, although you may hold the fortresses, yet they will not save you if the people hate you, for there will never be wanting foreigners to assist a people who have taken arms against you.'

Chapter 20, Paragraph 6 – On whether to build fortresses in your kingdom or not. Machiavelli does not rank them as of great importance, for the reason cited above, and ends up stating:

'…I shall praise him who builds fortresses as well as him who does not, and I shall blame whoever, trusting in them, cares little about being hated by the people.'

Chapter 20, Paragraph 6

Success creates more devotion than being nice.

'Nothing makes a prince so much esteemed as great enterprises and setting a fine example.'

Chapter 21, Paragraph 1 – On how to gain renown and loyalty.

It is best to keep men poor and on a permanent war footing, for this will be an antidote to ambition and boredom.

'…for [Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Spain] held the minds of the barons of Castile occupied in thinking of the war and not anticipating any innovations; thus they did not perceive that by these means he was acquiring power and authority over them…And his actions have arisen in such a way, one out of the other, that men have never been given time to work steadily against him.

Chapter 21, Paragraph 1 – Machiavelli's extended description of Ferdinand's triumphs and character describes a clever and far thinking man who used "the way of the fox" to gain ground against his opponents, and to bring the People of his lands to support his causes.

Staying neutral is always fatal.

'A prince is also respected when he is either a true friend or a downright enemy, that is to say, when, without any reservation, he declares himself in favor of one party against the other; which course will always be more advantageous than standing neutral…Thus it will always happen that he who is not your friend will demand your neutrality, whilst he who is your friend will entreat you to declare yourself with arms.'

Chapter 21, Paragraphs 3 & 4 – On the dangers of trying to stay out of the game for safety's sake. Essentially, Machiavelli is saying that you can never make everyone happy, so carefully choose who you will stand with and then stand firm.

In times of adversity, do not trade your authority for protection, for you will be doubly exposed.

'And here it is to be noted that a prince ought to take care never to make an alliance with one more powerful than himself for the purposes of attacking others, unless necessity compels him, as is said above; because if he conquers you are at his discretion, and princes ought to avoid as much as possible being at the discretion of any one.'

Chapter 21, Paragraph 5 – On making appropriate alliances, and why.

Do not try to hide from the horrors of the world, believing that the pretense of a benign world will make it so. This self-deception ultimately creates more horror.

'Never let any Government imagine that it can choose perfectly safe courses; rather let it expect to have to take very doubtful ones, because it is found in ordinary affairs that one never seeks to avoid one trouble without running into another; but prudence consists in knowing how to distinguish the character of troubles, and for choice to take the lesser evil.'

Chapter 21, Paragraph 6 – From perhaps one of the most reviled chapters on leadership ever, this paragraph in particular gives rise to Machiavelli's reputation as a pessimist and immoral pragmatist (raison d'etat, "reason of state"). However one man's immorality is another's idealism, and it serves no ones' interest to judge Machiavelli's brilliant observations with a moralism relative to religiosity. Ref. "Overview" at the end of this booklet.

Choose well the company you keep, for it will reflect on you for good or ill.

'And the first opinion which one forms of a prince, and of his understanding, is by observing the men he has around him; and when they are capable and faithful he may always be considered wise, because he has known how to recognize the capable and to keep them faithful.

Chapter 22, Paragraph 1 – On how to choose a staff, and to what ends.

There are three classes of intellects: brilliant, smart, and dumb.

"Because there are three classes of intellects: one which comprehends by itself; another which appreciates what others comprehended; and a third which neither comprehends by itself nor by the showing of others; the first is the most excellent, the second is good, the third is useless."

Chapter 22, Paragraph 2 – This little bon-bon is not repeated often enough. It is part of Machiavelli's general advice on picking a staff.

Men will be false to you unless you compel them to be true by creating circumstances in which falsehood will not pay.

'On the other hand, to keep his servant honest the prince ought to study him, honoring him, enriching him, doing him kindnesses, sharing with him the honors and cares; and at the same time let him see that he cannot stand alone, so that many honors may not make him desire more, many riches make him wish for more, and that many cares may make him dread chances.'

Chapter 22, Paragraph 4 – On how to keep your staff loyal. And:

'And [loyal councilors] are not to found otherwise, because men will always prove untrue to you unless they are kept honest by constraint. Therefore it must be inferred that good counsels, whencesoever they come, are born of the wisdom of the prince, and not the wisdom of the prince from good counsels.'

Chapter 23, Paragraph 6

Make yourself likeable when necessary, but beware the illusory emotional rewards from those yielding to your charm.

'With [your carefully selected] councilors, separately and collectively, he ought to carry himself in such a way that each of them should know that, the more freely he shall speak, the more he shall be preferred; outside of these, he should listen to no one, pursue the thing resolved on, and be steadfast in his resolutions. He who does otherwise is either overthrown by flatterers, or is so often changed by varying opinions that he falls into contempt.'

Chapter 23, Paragraph 2 – On whom to trust.

Make life good for your people every day, because their memory is short and their pleasures fleeting.

'…because men are attracted more by the present than by the past, and when they find the present good they enjoy it and seek no further;…'

Chapter 24, Paragraph 1 – Specifically, Machiavelli is explaining why his earlier advice (on treating the People well, and protecting their interests) will serve a prince in good stead in the long run. Would that this particular "Machiavellian" advice be included in more management manuals.

Fortune is like a powerful river; if you are prepared for the currents, the waters will not sink you.

'I compare her to one of those raging rivers, which when in flood overflows the plains, sweeping away trees and buildings, bearing away the soil from place to place; everything flies before it, all yield to its violence, without being able in any way to withstand it; and yet, though its nature be such, it does not follow therefore that men, when the weather becomes fair, shall not make provision, both with defenses and barriers, in such a manner that, rising again, the waters may pass away by canal, and their force be neither so unrestrained nor so dangerous. So it happens with fortune, who shows her power where valor has not prepared to resist her, and thither she turns her forces where she knows that barriers and defenses have not been raised to constrain her.'

Chapter 25, Paragraph 2 – This brilliant little paragraph is the flip side of the old saying, "Luck is 90% preparedness and 10% timing." Machiavelli does not deny the hand of Luck (Fortuna) in the affairs of humanity, but believes even more strongly in the power of free will and the ability that it confers on an individual to counter to twists of fate.

Fortune favors the bold.

'For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her.'

Chapter 25, Paragraph 8 – Machiavelli's famous advice to be bold in the face of fate is certainly misogynistic in viewpoint, but rings true nonetheless: Those who do not run with the Fates are doomed to be trampled by them.

GENERAL MAXIMS

The following are maxims and popular sayings attributed to Machiavelli which, although not expounded on in any specific section of *The Prince,* are nonetheless supported by the text. The maxim (in bold) is followed by a general location within *The Prince* of the text that most closely supports it, if applicable, along with an explanation of the context (in italics). I have discovered that a number of ideas attributed to *The Prince* actually derive from *Discourses* (ref. Notes), but I include them here anyway with an explanation. This way, when you correct someone by saying "Oh no, that idea was not in *The Prince*, it is from Book One of Machiavelli's *Discourses*," you will sound brilliant.

Severity is usually more effective, but humanity, in some situations, brings better fruit.

Machiavelli constantly states that being morally "good" is always an admirable goal, but he tempered this with the observation that it is usually not possible in the art of politics. Repeatedly in The Prince *he advises to take a gentle, humanitarian route, just never at the cost of state security (ref. The Prince, Chapter 18). He also cautioned strongly against being severe at every measure; such methods backlash in many situations. This particular maxim, I think, very clearly encapsulates the primary meta-advice of* The Prince*:*

Play the deal you are dealt, not the one you prefer.

'Attachment to generosity or to cruelty, or any theory or style, will cause your defeat in the end; the only attachment a Prince or any leader should have is to the stability and security of her realm.'

Cesare Borgia, Duke Valentino, was a Perfect Prince.

'Therefore, he who considers it necessary to secure himself in his new principality, to win friends, to overcome either by force or fraud, to make himself beloved and feared by the people, to be followed and revered by the soldiers, to exterminate those who have power or reason to hurt him, to change the old order of things for new, to be severe and gracious, magnanimous and liberal, to destroy a disloyal soldiery and to create new, to maintain friendship with kings

and princes in such a way that they must help him with zeal and offend with caution, cannot find a more lively example than the actions of this man.'

Chapter 7, Paragraph 11 – The Borgia's have a reputation, and Machiavelli's use of the Duke Valentino as a primary example of a master statesman has hurt Machiavelli far more than old Cesare. The only reason that this is so, however, is because Machiavelli admired the Duke's political methods without condemning his cruelty or immorality. This is unjust in the main, because Machiavelli was only concerned with cruelty as applied to the People of a nation holistically, and he was not at all concerned with Christian morality within the framework of politics. Machiavelli felt no need to bother judging the Duke on matters outside the political realm. Machiavelli addressed this later in Chapter 17, Paragraph 1:

'Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; notwithstanding, his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty.'

Contrast this to Machiavelli's scathing review of Agaothocles the Sicilian (b. 361 B.C.) in Chapter 8, Paragraph 3.

Do what you must do in any case, but try to represent it as a special favor to the people.

Machiavelli was very keen on what we call P.R. One of his strongest admonishments was to keep the People happy, content, and loyal, and to do so at any cost. If that meant subterfuge and trickery, then Machiavelli accepted that as a fee well paid for the greater good of the State.

Excellent plans without arms are not enough or else Florence would still be a republic.

Generally, Machiavelli supported the idea that a Prince/nation should be well armed in several chapters of The Prince *(10.2, 12.2, 14.2). I'm not sure how well Florence would take this maxim today, but in the 1500s it was very topical. In describing the state of affairs of the time, Machiavelli essentially explained this maxim in Chapter 26, Paragraph 7.*

It is wise to cultivate friendship and loyalty in all social domains, but it is foolish to expect any of those relationships to withstand any hardship.

and:

Never let friendship bind you to a disadvantage.
Chapters 9 and 10 cover a lot of ground similar to this advice, and while Machiavelli never wrote these exact words, the maxims are definitely supported by the text.

Religion must be promoted even though it may be false, provided it is of a kind that preserves social solidarity and promotes manly virtues.
This maxim is from Isiah Berlin's writings, one of the great philosophers of the 20th Century and a man who was more intelligent than I am by several orders of magnitude. I nearly tied myself into knots trying to find the source of this maxim in The Prince*, but I never did. It is, in fact, adapted from Book 1, Chapter 11 ("Of the Religion of the Romans") in the* Discourses*, another good reason why you should read it. Also note that Berlin completed the saying with the phrase: "…as Christianity has historically failed to do." This part is supported by the following chapter in* Discourses*, Book 1, Chapter 12 ("That it is of much moment to make account of Religion; and that Italy, through the Roman Church, being wanting therein, has been ruined").*

It is in the interest of the weak to design societies that encumber the strong.
This is very Machiavellian, but it was not discussed in The Prince *either. To find this idea in Machiavelli's work, you must turn to Book 1, Chapters 3 and 4, in his Discourses.*

Justice is elegant revenge; revenge is justice for those who cannot afford elegance.
I really like this saying, and pulled The Prince *apart looking for some version of it; but no, Machiavelli never addressed the issue of revenge vs. justice there. Instead, turn to* Discourses*, Book 2, Chapter 28.*

Never assume any conversation is private or confidential.
Again, not in The Prince*. Look in* Discourses*, Book 3, Chapter 6, "Of Conspiracies." Mostly this maxim is an extrapolation of several paragraphs in this chapter, but it is close on the mark and certainly a piece of advice Machiavelli would endorse.*

BOGUS MAXIMS

There are a number of sayings that people think Machiavelli said, or implied, or perhaps maybe kind-of hinted at. I have collected here a number these bogus sayings so that you, as an *educated reader*, can state with absolute confidence: "No, Machiavelli never wrote anything of the kind."

My hypothesis about these bogus maxims is that they are adaptations of genuine quotes, usually taken out of context or derived by questionable means from the words of Machiavelli himself. This explains why they appear so Machiavellian when they are not. If a particular saying walks this line, I have included an explanation of how it is, or is not, related to Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Just so you know, this section required a lot more work than the previous ones, because I was combing the book looking for things that it does not contain; sort of like picking apart a haystack looking for a needle that was never there. You may not end up with a needle, but you know for damn sure that haystack is needle-free! (I also compared the Discourses text in case these were imported from that book, although I admit I did not comb it as closely as The Prince.)

If you must commit a crime do not advertise it beforehand, since otherwise your enemies may destroy you before you destroy them.

This seems like good common sense, and I am fairly sure Machiavelli would have approved of it in principle, but I do not find this particular advice anywhere in The Prince.

Do not be surrounded by over-powerful servants—victorious generals are best got rid of, otherwise they may get rid of you.

Of all the bogus maxims, this one nearly made it onto the "legitimate" list. However a thorough reading of The Prince *never reveals a source for this idea, and a thorough reading of* Discourses *reveals the opposite. I think in this case, Machiavelli's use of examples of princes disposing of their generals or captains was interpreted to mean that Machiavelli was a proponent of the method. Quite the opposite: Machiavelli wrote repeatedly that the best way to secure loyalty was to reward servants, not kill them. He admitted that over-ambitious servants have to be dealt with permanently and severely, but over-powerful ones could be very useful. The key is to remember that Machiavelli was teaching* ***the use of power for politically expedient ends, not selfish ones****.*

The person most afraid of dying is the one who has contributed the least in living.

Not a bad saying to ponder, but this is not something that Machiavelli concerned himself with.

A person is a product of his past and his genes. The adult maximizes his genes and the child whines about his past.

Genes were an unknown concept in Machaivelli's era; and while the nature vs. nurture debate was addressed in some philosophical circles in his time, Machiavelli was a "free will" man all the way. This saying is clever, but not Machiavellian.

Assertiveness towards those who have power over you will always be resented.

This saying is nominally Machiavellian. It is common sense, and Machiavelli often said the reverse ("those you have power over will resent the power you have") but he did not specifically write this that I have found.

All fear and distress is a direct result of your perception. See it differently and the horror goes.

Perhaps a good suggestion for those studying Machiavelli, but that does not make it Machiavellian.

Remind your friends often that they are indeed your friends. You need not remind your enemies.

A fine Blues song ("you don't have to keep track of your enemies if you keep track of your friends"), but not Machiavellian, unless taken under the banner of "keep your reputation in good standing."

Superiority only exists in the situation.

This is Machiavellian in the same way that 2+2=4 is Euclidean.

Make your reactions unpredictable. Overreact by design, respond to a slight with kindness, the next time with rage. Unpredictability contributes to strength. Being predictable is the first step on the path to exploitation.

This is definitely anti-Machiavellian. I don't know who came up with this, but not only is it not supported by the text, Machiavelli writes just the opposite in Chapter 19, Paragraph 3:

'It makes him contemptible to be considered fickle, frivolous, effeminate, mean-spirited, irresolute, from all of which a prince should guard himself as from a rock; and he should endeavor to show in his actions greatness, courage, gravity, and fortitude; and in his private dealings with his subjects let him show that his judgments are irrevocable, and maintain himself in such reputation that no one can hope either to deceive him or to get round him.'

The essential difference between the terrorist and the noble conqueror is the quality of the army.

I really do wonder where this came from. For one thing, in Machiavelli's era, a "terrorist" as modern readers understand the term did not exist. Perhaps this goes back to "history is written by the winners" (which is not from Machiavelli either).

The weak and obsessive acutely contemplate decisive action but rarely take it.

It is certainly true that Machiavelli promotes bold action; ref. Chapter 25, Paragraph 8, "Fortune favors the bold." However much the reverse of that philosophy may be implied, though, I have never located this statement in the writings I have read.

There is nothing wrong with pride, save that it often will cause you grief. Those in power will hate you for it. It is far smarter to be humble when you are powerless. Be proud when you are in a position of strength.

This has a strong Machiavellian ring to it, but I cannot locate any provenance for it.

The most effective way to make a threat is to present it as a secret plan to those you know to be untrustworthy. This adds credibility and deniability.

There is something distinctly Machiavellian about this, but I cannot find a reference to support it in The Prince *or* Discourses.

BIOGRAPHY

Niccolò di Bernado dei Machiavelli (May 3, 1469 – June 21, 1527) was a Florentine political philosopher, musician, poet, and (yes, really) romantic comedic playwright. Machiavelli was born in Florence to an impoverished branch of an influential old Florentine family. At that time Florence (as a city state) was flowering under the iron fist of the Medici, but in 1494, when Machiavelli was 25, the Medici were overthrown and Florence became a Republic (the Pope was not pleased).

Machiavelli served the Republic, traveling extensively on diplomatic missions (it was from these experiences that he would draw influence for his work The Prince). He held this position for 14 years, and his official title was "Chancellor and Secretary to the Ten of Liberty and Peace," which sounds very "republican" after all.

However, when Pope Julius II restored the Medicis to power in 1512 (assisted by the Spanish, naturally, and only after the French were driven out on a rail – remember, this is Italy), Machiavelli was briefly imprisoned and tortured in the Bargello in Florence. When Pope Leo X became pontiff in 1513, himself a member of the Medici family, he secured the release of Machiavelli and sent him into exile.

Machiavelli went to his country residence at Sant'Andrea in Percussina, where he devoted himself to literature. It was during this time that he wrote The Prince and his other well known books, Discourses and The Art of War. He eventually made it back to his beloved Florence in 1525, when the Medici were (yet again) kicked out, but he died shortly thereafter in 1527. His resting place is unknown; however, a cenotaph in his honor can be found at the Basilica di Santa Croce di Firenze in Florence. Perhaps most intriguingly, he left behind a beloved wife and six children, which is something that very few general biographies mention, even the honored Encyclopedia Britannica.

It is interesting to know the circumstances in which The Prince was written. In a famous letter to his friend Francesco Guicciardini, the Florentine diplomat, Machiavelli wrote that in a normal day while in exile in Sant'Andrea in Percussina, he would rise early, work the fields or the woods until lunchtime, socialize in the local bars, but then:

"When evening comes, I return home (from the local tavern) and go to my study. On the threshold I strip off my muddy, sweaty workaday clothes, and put on the robes of court and palace, and in this graver dress I enter the courts of the ancients and am welcomed by them, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born. And there I make bold to speak to them and ask the motives of their actions, and they, in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I forget the world, remember no vexation, fear poverty no more, tremble no more at death; I pass indeed into their world." (The Literary Works of Machiavelli, trans. Hale. Oxford 1961, page 139.)

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OVERVIEW:

The Means Depends on the Ends or, Pluralism Born

'But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of the matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen, because 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.'

The Prince, *Chapter 15, Paragraph 1*

Philosophers wank on about the meaning of "is" and theologians seek the mustard seed of hope, but Machiavelli took things as they are. His observations are spot on because they are not clouded by the delusion of human greatness; to Machiavelli, a man might be a great leader or a great saint but humanity rarely lives up the standards of either.

Machiavelli has been parsed for centuries, and I do not think I can add anything new to the dialogue about the importance and influence of his work. Fortunately, I do not feel any compunction to do so in any case, as I stand behind (way, way, behind) Isiah Berlin's analysis. He wrote a masterful essay appropriately titled, "The Question of Machiavelli" in 1971. It appeared in the *New York Review of Books* (Volume 17, No. 7) that year as a special supplement and they generously offer it online for free viewing at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/10391. I suggest you read the entire essay, which for a philosophical work is extremely short and understandable. But—as usual—I will condense it and simplify it even further for you here.

Berlin starts by spending a lot of ink reviewing prior philosophical analyses. This is important and vital in order to truly understand the state of discourse concerning Machiavelli's impact on Western political theory. Naturally, I will skip that part.

The lovely part of Berlin's analysis is encapsulated in his theory on why, if nothing else, the debate concerning Machiavelli is enduring:

> *"Machiavelli's cardinal achievement is his uncovering of an insoluble dilemma…It stems from his de facto recognition that ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other, that entire systems of value may come into collision without possibility of rational arbitration, and that not merely in exceptional circumstance, as a result of abnormality or accident or error…but (this was surely new) as part of the normal human situation."*

In other words, the key to understanding the impact Machiavelli has had on Western political theory—and Western philosophy and Western theater and probably Country Western music for all I know—is to understand that his writings were not as devious as they were *divisive*: He invented Dualism.

His major observations on humanity are nothing more than what you or I would call "common sense" over a beer and some pretzels: people are greedy, selfish, short-sighted and generally not to be trusted to act on their highest

moral instincts. While most philosophers and theologians would agree on this sad fact, Machiavelli breaks from the pack by *ending his analysis there*. He is unconcerned with the moral greatness mankind "should" live up to, or with the germ of spiritual greatness that may lie in every person's breast. Quite simply, his concern was for a completely different set of virtues than the prevalent religious ones. Machiavelli does not spend time trying to marry human behavior to a Natural World View, which is what religions generally spend most of their time trying to accomplish. It was assumed that a perfect society could be actualized based on some unifying principle (Christ's sacrifice, the Church's rule, Plato's logic, the Koran, etc.) and that humanity just needed to get with the program: there is an ideal and there is reality, and the distance between the two is a direct line. Machiavelli breaks this apart by positing a separate set of virtues, which Berlin defines as "pagan," in parallel to the virtues of the theologians:

> *"For if [Machiavelli's] position is valid then it is impossible to even the notion of …a perfect society, for there exist at least two sets of virtues – let us call them the Christian and the pagan – which are not merely in practice, but in principle, incompatible."*

Furthermore, Machiavelli seems unconcerned by his revolution, as Berlin so clearly states: "There was no problem and no agony for him; he shows no trace of skepticism or relativism; he chose his side, and took little interest in the values that this choice ignored or flouted." Indeed, it seems the crime of Machiavelli is less his ideas than his casual dismissal of the prevalent and powerful dogmas of the Church. He chose his side—the civitas, pagan virtues of the ancient Romans—and did not look back, or even to the side. Machiavelli addresses this matter not at all, instead giving indirect clues based on his advice in *The Prince* for a man to choose between traditional or pagan virtues:

"Everyone admits how praiseworthy it is in a prince to keep faith, and to live with integrity and not with craft. Nevertheless our experience has been that those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to circumvent the intellect of men by craft, and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word."
The Prince, *Chapter 18, Paragraph 1*

My opinion is that the worst criticism that can be slung at Machiavelli is that he was not very sentimental. Meanwhile the concept of social pluralism can certainly be laid at his feet, which is perhaps far more unforgivable a sin than any political pragmatism Machiavelli espoused. Berlin sums the matter up thusly:

"His achievement is of the first order, if only because the dilemma has never given men peace since it came to light."