

1 Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)

Machiavelli has acquired a reputation as the original political pragmatist – a theorist who provides a substantial defence of the ends excusing the means (as long as the ends are judged to be successful). In other circles his writings became synonymous with the work of the devil (due in part to his anti-clericalism). As we shall see, this infamous perspective is somewhat overblown, but it gains currency from Machiavelli's own political experience. He was born in Florence in 1469 and was given a classical education by his father, who was a lawyer. This was to serve him well in his career as a diplomat, political officer and writer. During his youth Italy was dominated by five main powers amongst the city states (one of which was his own Florence). These were held together by the tactful diplomacy of Lorenzo de' Medici (Bull 1995: x). Having experienced the turbulent world of politics in Italy after 1494, Machiavelli entered public office in 1498 and soon became head of the second chancery of Florence, which required not only acknowledged diplomatic skills but also a mastery of the humane disciplines (Skinner 1981: 3). In the period until 1512 he was a central figure in the political life of the Florentine Republic, taking on responsibility in the fields of diplomacy and the militia, and, under the personal favour of the Head of State Piero Soderini, Machiavelli was sent on numerous missions around Europe to represent Florence in political affairs. However, on the reclamation of power by the Medici in 1512 Machiavelli fell from favour, and in 1513 he was imprisoned. It was during this period that he took to writing, and indeed he used his literary work as a means of gaining respect from the new regime. In 1527 the Republic was restored, but, despite his yearning for public office and his support for the new establishment, Machiavelli was regarded with suspicion due to his overtures to the Medici (Bull 1995: xv). He died soon afterwards, having been rejected by the new republicans.

Machiavelli's political method derived much from the political events he encountered during his career. He experienced the fluctuations of power in Florence, as it passed to and fro between the Medici and the Republic, and also the internecine struggles within Italy between city states and the major powers. As a civil representative of Florence he had first-hand exposure to the mechanisms of political power and the diplomatic processes which held the Italian city states together and ultimately fragmented them. Indeed this was a most turbulent period

in which to live, let alone be a major representative of one of the most powerful city-states. Europe was an area of major conflict with 'a hapless Italy serving as a battleground for the European nation-states' (Anglo 1995: 73). It should be no surprise, then, that Machiavelli's thought is somewhat enterprising in interpreting methods of manipulating the political machinery and in understanding the machinations of power.

The regime that Machiavelli was born into was relatively sedate, due in part to the skilful and tactful leadership of Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, whose influence managed to hold the potentially contesting city states of Italy together. Lorenzo died in 1492, and two years later his son Piero was banished for treachery. This led to a new period of republicanism which was initially disputatious, especially under the divisive influence of the Dominican prior Girolamo Savonarola. This was a time when Machiavelli had little scope for influence, but, as a young man, he was able to master the arts that would serve him well after Savonarola's execution in 1498. During the years 1498–1512 Machiavelli became increasingly expert in military affairs as he negotiated over numerous conflicts, not least that between Florence and Pisa (Anglo 1995: 76) and enjoyed the favour of Piero Soderini. The enduring hostilities between the French and Spanish continued to have a strong influence within Italy and on Machiavelli's career, as Florence had a particularly close relationship with France. When Spanish armies overcame and humiliated the republican militia created by Machiavelli and paved the way for the return of the Medici in 1512, he soon found himself on the outside of the political machinery. For years he attempted to find himself a new position within the Medici regime, and it was during this period that Machiavelli was at his most productive in attempting to accommodate his republican ideas within a position that was supportive of the Medici regime. It was his misfortune not to survive long enough to see the developed restoration of the republic in Florence, and indeed the success of the Florentine army in repulsing the siege of 1529–30 (Bull 1995: xiv).

Machiavelli's ideas have come to be irrevocably centred upon the argument put forward in *The Prince*. Some, such as Bull (1995), suggest that this is not unfair, as it was clearly his political masterpiece. Others, such as Hale (1990), argue that the dogmatic, black-and-white arguments put forward in *The Prince* must be contextualised within the broader spectrum of his writings. To this extent it is important to note that *The Prince* (1513) was the first of his major political and historical works to be written. It was followed by the more circumspect *Discourses on Livy*, the *Art of War* and the *Florentine History*; on top of this output he also produced a range of literary material. So it is worth pursuing the question of why *The Prince* is the piece of work with which Machiavelli's thought is almost exclusively linked in the popular mind.

Part of the reason is stylistic. *The Prince* shocked many with the brutal realism of its guidance for princes on how to maintain power. Thus it is noted for 'hard and calculated advice about how a new prince should act to establish himself in a recently conquered principdom, and a good deal of the advice is about the use of violence and deceit' (McClelland 1996: 151). However McClelland rightly asks

who exactly was so horrified by this account, given that this was exactly how successful princes did maintain their positions, and that many historical precedents existed for this kind of manipulation. In the light of this, it is pertinent to note the secularism of Machiavelli's argument, which was somewhat innovative and likely to cause consternation amongst those who tied their religious and political ideas closely together. Whilst Machiavelli's ideas were not necessarily anti-Christian, the picture he painted of political necessity clearly rested on secular premises. Indeed this is the basis upon which the argument is constructed which promotes Machiavelli as the founder of modern politics. However, as McClelland argues, his main reference points were in the classics, and to present him as particularly forward-looking is somewhat erroneous (McClelland 1996: 153).

In any case, whilst *The Prince* provides a graphic and riveting insight into Machiavelli's thought, his ideas on republican government are more thoroughly expressed in his other major work of political theory, *Discourses on Livy*. Here Machiavelli puts the case for republics governed by rule of law, on the basis that, without legal constraints to promote honesty and morality, individuals resort to irrationality and selfishness. It is interesting to contrast this perspective with the bullish prognosis of *The Prince*. The latter was of course a plea for favour to Lorenzo de' Medici, as was evident from the oleaginous dedication of the book. The *Discourses* on the other hand were more measured and contain analyses of many different forms of government. Despite the apparent anomaly that Machiavelli wrote in praise of an autocratic prince in the earlier work and as a vehement republican in the *Discourses*, commentators such as Bull have argued that these two positions are not as contradictory as might seem to be the case at first. Ultimately, according to the latter, Machiavelli was 'interested in the state, rather than in the form of its government, and in the state as a self-sufficient entity in continual conflict with other states – and therefore in need of power' (Bull 1995: xviii). In this sense, it mattered little if a principedom was in place if that prince was able to represent the interests of the state and operationalise effective government. Above all, the *Discourses* interrogate early Roman history in order to identify the means through which it maintained power and to use it as an exemplar for good government for Italian city states in the sixteenth century (Skinner 1981).

Machiavelli's other major works, as their titles suggest, do not contribute further to his political philosophy as outlined in *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. *The Art of War* and *Florentine History* are centred upon military tactics and the developments in the republic respectively, and the former (published during his lifetime) helped to establish Machiavelli as a respected man of letters. On top of these works he also produced literary materials, such as the play, *Mandragola*, and entered into prolonged correspondence. However, what Machiavelli truly yearned for was a return to political office, and it is indeed ironic that, when he had reconciled himself with the Medici regime, it was succeeded by the return of the republic just before his death.

One of the first things to note about the argument put forward in *The Prince* is Machiavelli's use of history and precedent to justify the development of his political

ideas. Rather than basing his philosophy of politics on Christian principles and morality, he sought to derive a more solid foundation through the application of historical precedent. This historical outlook led him to provide a rather damning indictment of his fellow humans, whom he characterised as reckless, selfish and treacherous. From this psychological basis he argued that effective government had to rein in these tendencies, so as to provide political order within the state. Individuals had to be redeemed, and this redemption would be provided by the rule of law of the state. In this sense, then, it was wrong to mindlessly support and laud rulers if their government was ineffectual and to implore them to be compassionate and tolerant. For Machiavelli, strong, successful leadership was required in a world which showed little respect for the sympathetic approach to government:

a prince could only survive by meanness and cruelty, by inspiring fear, and by keeping his promises just so long as it was advantageous for him to do so – and no longer. This was how the rulers of the world did behave. If they did not, they would soon be destroyed.

(Anglo 1995: 82)

This perspective was based, for example, on his first-hand experience of the ruthless methods of Cesare Borgia, who attempted to create his own sphere of jurisdiction and maintain it through single-minded determination and severe, violent tactics (sometimes to those closest to him). However, Machiavelli also saw weaknesses in Borgia and recognised his ill fortune in ultimately failing to achieve his objectives (Plamenatz 1992: 50–1). From this we can glean an understanding of Machiavelli's pragmatism. Despite the dogmatic assertions that make up the perspective outlined in *The Prince*, he is arguing that princes have to repudiate grand theorising about the way of the world and get down to the actual business of governing. It was not for princes to engage in bridge-building between opposing perspectives; their role was not one of accommodation – rather they had to be decisive and forceful. They needed to exercise their strength to ensure that the people of the state stayed in line.

This challenged the dominant position held by Christian ethics in the political life he encountered (Skinner 1981: 30). It was not for Machiavelli to defend the divine right of kings, rather he suggested that the benevolence and charity supposedly encapsulated in Christian morality might undermine the ability of the prince to govern well. This is not to say that he rejected religion *per se* but he had severe misgivings about the interference of religion in political affairs. Not surprisingly, this aroused considerable controversy, and one that has dogged the debates over Machiavelli's thought ever since. In effect he was arguing 'the State needed a morality of its own, the morality of success: success in defending itself, and thus guaranteeing the safety of its people, success in conquest when this was necessary to protect its own interests' (Hale 1990: 28). It should be clear,

then, that Machiavelli's theory of morality was primarily one of adaptability and pragmatism coupled with a ruthlessness which makes his position appear somewhat amoral. It should also be apparent that the morality he attached to the operation of the state related to the *nature* of government, rather than to the actual *form* of government. Brown has noted how, in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli felt that all the requirements of good government and its associated capacities were unlikely to reside in one person, and therefore that republics were more likely to fulfil his requirements than principalities (Brown 1991: 305). *The Prince*, however, is explicitly focused on the creation of new principedoms and the problem of governing them appropriately (Skinner 1981: 23). If the *nature* of government is the key to his work, then this inconsistency may not be as contrary as it might appear at first.

Machiavelli's faith in republicanism is identifiable in his notion of *virtù*, which does not directly equate with goodness but does embody the notion that individuals should act with public service and citizenship in mind. Of course, this also meant that some misdemeanours may be acceptable if these republican ideals were to be protected. So the quality of *virtù* refers to the prowess and ability to achieve political goals, which for Machiavelli involved republican objectives (Anglo 1995: 79). At the same time he believed that people were also reliant on luck (*fortuna*) in achieving their aims. Thus, he argued (in a thinly veiled reference to the return of the Medici, according to Skinner) that the establishment of principedoms often relied heavily on luck. The secret for princes was to take advantage of this situation and reinforce the position that they had been fortunate enough to achieve. In short, he suggested that successful princes made their own luck through their *virtù*. One means of achieving this was to establish a sound system of laws and an effective fighting machine along the lines of a citizen militia (there is an extensive discussion of the means of raising, training and retaining militias in *The Art of War*, especially in Book I). It should be clear, then, that the argument put forward in *The Prince* is a clever blend of political strategy designed to appeal to the Medici in Florence and republican objectives associated with good citizenship and public responsibilities.

As his work preceded that of the other authors covered in this book by over a century, we cannot compare Machiavelli with any direct contemporaries in great depth, but it is clear that he did have an impact on later analysts of the nature of government, human freedom and human nature. An interesting point to take up here is the comparison between Machiavelli and Hobbes. Plamenatz explains how the views of both on human nature are sometimes wrongly conflated. For the former, individuals may behave in a selfish and brutish fashion, but this can be redeemed by the institution of good government and sound laws. For the latter, of course, the institution of government and law is about controlling these inherent but self-regarding features of humanity to allow society to function. Indeed it is useful to note that Machiavelli, despite the reputation which precedes him, probably says much less about an essential human nature than do either Hobbes or Rousseau (Plamenatz 1992: 65–6). Machiavelli is more interested in the nature of government.

The other key comparison to note is with later conservative thinkers such as Burke, who, like Machiavelli, put faith in historical precedent as a key gauge of the

desirability of social change. Indeed the charge has been laid at the door of both that they have employed somewhat selective readings of history to justify their political perspectives. However, it is the area of methods of political science which has highlighted the similarities between Machiavelli's approach and that of theorists such as Hume. The link between Machiavelli and conservatism is therefore primarily a matter of method, given the former's predilection for republicanism – which many conservatives would abhor, although some conservatives might have a modicum of empathy with the idea of the prince.

Even if Machiavelli's name is often wrongly used in contemporary discourses, it must be recognised that the derivation of the adjective 'machievellian' does have some truth attached to it. Moreover, in terms of common perceptions of politics, Machiavelli's analysis seems incredibly resonant for modern times; it is not accidental that political and governmental practices of today, such as spin-doctoring, have had the label of machievellianism attached to them. However, these practices continue to face stern criticism among those who believe in different types of politics in pursuit of objectives like the common good and purer systems of democracy. Elsewhere, those concerned with the advancement of secular morality in contemporary politics still owe much to Machiavelli's early input. But perhaps the greatest continuing relevance of Machiavelli's thought lies in the possibility of his ideas being used by a variety of people of different ideological hues. This tells us much about the uses and abuses of power which continue to characterise modern political life and installs Machiavelli as an important contributor to our understanding of contemporary politics, even if we now tend to believe that good government *should* be free from deceitfulness and violence for the sake of maintaining political power.

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EXTRACT FROM NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI, *THE PRINCE*

VIII: Of those who by their crimes come to be Princes

But since from privacy a man may also rise to be a Prince in one or other of two ways, neither of which can be referred wholly either to merit or to fortune, it is fit that I notice them here, though one of them may fall to be discussed more fully in treating of Republics.

The ways I speak of are, first, when the ascent to power is made by paths of wickedness and crime; and second, when a private person becomes ruler of his country by the favour of his fellow-citizens. The former method I shall make clear by two examples, one ancient, the other modern, without entering further into the merits of the matter, for these, I think, should be enough for any one who is driven to follow them.

Agathocles the Sicilian came, not merely from a private station, but from the very dregs of the people, to be King of Syracuse. Son of a potter, through all the stages of his fortune he led a foul life. His vices, however, were conjoined with so great vigour both of mind and body, that becoming a soldier, he rose through the various grades of the service to be Praetor of Syracuse. Once established in that post, he resolved to make himself Prince, and to hold by violence and without obligation to others the authority which had been spontaneously entrusted to him. Accordingly, after imparting his design to Hamilcar, who with the Carthaginian armies was at that time waging war in Sicily, he one morning assembled the people and senate of Syracuse as though to consult with them on matters of public moment, and on a preconcerted signal caused his soldiers to put to death all the senators, and the wealthiest of the commons. These being thus got rid of, he assumed and retained possession of the sovereignty without opposition on the part of the people; and although twice defeated by the Carthaginians, and afterwards besieged, he was able not only to defend his city, but leaving a part of his forces for its protection, to invade Africa with the remainder, and so in a short time to raise the siege of Syracuse, reducing the Carthaginians to the utmost extremities, and compelling them to make terms whereby they abandoned Sicily to him and confined themselves to Africa.

Whoever examines this man's actions and achievements will discover little or nothing in them which can be ascribed to Fortune, seeing, as has already been said, that it was not through the favour of any, but by the regular steps of the military service, gained at the cost of a thousand hardships and hazards, he reached the principedom which he afterwards maintained by so many daring and dangerous enterprises. Still, to slaughter fellow-citizens, to betray friends, to be devoid of honour, pity, and religion, cannot be counted as merits, for these are means which may lead to power, but which confer no glory. Wherefore, if in respect of the valour with which he encountered and extricated himself from difficulties, and the constancy of his spirit in supporting and conquering adverse fortune, there seems no reason to judge him inferior to the greatest captains that have ever lived, his unbridled cruelty and inhumanity, together with his countless crimes, forbid us to number him with

the greatest men; but, at any rate we cannot attribute to Fortune or to merit what he accomplished without either.

In our own times, during the papacy of Alexander VI, Oliverotto of Fermo, who some years before had been left an orphan, and had been brought up by his maternal uncle Giovanni Fogliani, was sent while still a lad to serve under Paolo Vitelli, in the expectation that a thorough training under that commander might qualify him for high rank as a soldier. After the death of Paolo, he served under his brother Vitellozzo, and in a very short time, being of a quick wit, hardy and resolute, he became one of the first soldiers of his company. But thinking it beneath him to serve under others, with the countenance of the Vitelleschi and the connivance of certain citizens of Fermo who preferred the slavery to the freedom of their country, he formed the design to seize on that town.

He accordingly wrote to Giovanni Fogliani that after many years of absence from home, he desired to see him and his native city once more, and to look a little into the condition of his patrimony; and as his one endeavour had been to make himself a name, in order that his fellow-citizens might see that his time had not been mis-spent, he proposed to return honourably attended by a hundred horsemen from among his own friends and followers; and he begged Giovanni graciously to arrange for his reception by the citizens of Fermo with corresponding marks of distinction, as this would be creditable not only to himself, but also to the uncle who had brought him up.

Giovanni, accordingly, did not fail in any proper attention to his nephew, but caused him to be splendidly received by his fellow-citizens, and lodged him in his house; where Oliverotto having passed some days, and made the necessary arrangements for carrying out his wickedness, gave a formal banquet, to which he invited his uncle and all the first men of Fermo. When the repast and the other entertainments proper to such an occasion had come to an end, Oliverotto artfully turned the conversation to matters of grave interest, by speaking of the greatness of Pope Alexander and Cesare his son, and of their enterprises; and when Giovanni and the others were replying to what he said, he suddenly rose up, observing that these were matters to be discussed in a more private place, and so withdrew to another chamber; whither his uncle and all the other citizens followed him, and where they had no sooner seated themselves, than soldiers rushing out from places of concealment put Giovanni and all the rest to death.

After this butchery, Oliverotto mounted his horse, rode through the streets, and besieged the chief magistrate in the palace, so that all were constrained by fear to yield obedience and accept a government of which he made himself head. And all who from being disaffected were likely to stand in his way, he put to death, while he strengthened himself with new ordinances, civil and military, to such purpose, that for a space of a year during which he retained the Princedom, he not merely kept a firm hold of the city, but grew formidable to all his neighbours. And it would have been as impossible to unseat him as it was to unseat Agathocles, had he not let himself be overreached by Cesare Borgia on the occasion when, as has already been told, the Orsini and Vitelli were entrapped at Sinigaglia; where he too being taken, one year after the

commission of his parricidal crime, was strangled along with Vitellozzo, whom he had assumed for his master in villainy as in valour.

It may be asked how Agathocles and some like him, after numerous acts of treachery and cruelty, have been able to live long in their own country in safety, and to defend themselves from foreign enemies, without being plotted against by their fellow-citizens, whereas, many others, by reason of their cruelty, have failed to maintain their position even in peaceful times, not to speak of the perilous times of war. I believe that this results from cruelty being well or ill employed. Those cruelties we may say are well employed, if it be permitted to speak well of things evil, which are done once for all under the necessity of self-preservation, and are not afterwards persisted in, but so far as possible modified to the advantage of the governed. Ill-employed cruelties, on the other hand, are those which from small beginnings increase rather than diminish with time. They who follow the first of these methods, may, by the grace of God and man, find, as did Agathocles, that their condition is not desperate; but by no possibility can the others maintain themselves.

Hence we may learn the lesson that on seizing a state, the usurper should make haste to inflict what injuries he must, at a stroke, that he may not have to renew them daily, but be enabled by their discontinuance to reassure men's minds, and afterwards win them over by benefits. Whosoever, either through timidity or from following bad counsels, adopts a contrary course, must keep the sword always drawn, and can put no trust in his subjects, who suffering from continued and constantly renewed severities, will never yield him their confidence. Injuries, therefore, should be inflicted all at once, that their ill savour being less lasting may the less offend; whereas, benefits should be conferred little by little, that so they may be more fully relished.

But, before all things, a Prince should so live with his subjects that no vicissitude of good or evil fortune shall oblige him to alter his behaviour; because, if a need to change comes through adversity, it is then too late to resort to severity; while any leniency you may use will be thrown away, for it will be seen to be compulsory and gain you no thanks.

IX: Of the civil Princedom

I come now to the second case, namely, of the leading citizen who, not by crimes or violence, but by the favour of his fellow-citizens, is made Prince of his country. This may be called a Civil Princedom, and its attainment depends not wholly on merit, nor wholly on good fortune, but rather on what may be termed a *fortunate astuteness*. I say then that the road to this Princedom lies either through the favour of the people or of the nobles. For in every city are to be found these two opposed humours having their origin in this, that the people desire not to be domineered over or oppressed by the nobles, while the nobles desire to oppress and domineer over the people. And from these two contrary appetites there arises in cities one of three results, a Princedom, or Liberty, or Licence. A Princedom is created either by the people or by the nobles, according as one or other of these factions has occasion for it. For when the nobles perceive that they cannot withstand the people, they set to work to magnify the

reputation of one of their number, and make him their Prince, to the end that under his shadow they may be enabled to indulge their desires. The people, on the other hand, when they see that they cannot make head against the nobles, invest a single citizen with all their influence and make him Prince, that they may have the shelter of his authority.

He who is made Prince by the favour of the nobles, has greater difficulty to maintain himself than he who comes to the Princedom by aid of the people, since he finds many about him who think themselves as good as he, and whom, on that account, he cannot guide or govern as he would. But he who reaches the Princedom by the popular support, finds himself alone, with none, or but a very few about him who are not ready to obey. Moreover, the demands of the nobles cannot be satisfied with credit to the Prince, nor without injury to others, while those of the people well may, the aim of the people being more honourable than that of the nobles, the latter seeking to oppress, the former not to be oppressed. Add to this, that a Prince can never secure himself against a disaffected people, their number being too great, while he may against a disaffected nobility, since their number is small. The worst that a Prince need fear from a disaffected people is that they may desert him, whereas when the nobles are his enemies he has to fear not only that they may desert him, but also that they may turn against him; because, as they have greater craft and foresight, they always choose their time to suit their safety, and seek favour with the side they think will win. Again, a Prince must always live with the same people, but need not always live with the same nobles, being able to make and unmake these from day to day, and give and take away their authority at his pleasure.

But to make this part of the matter clearer, I say that as regards the nobles there is this first distinction to be made. They either so govern their conduct as to bind themselves wholly to your fortunes, or they do not. Those who so bind themselves, and who are not grasping, should be loved and honoured. As to those who do not so bind themselves, there is this further distinction. For the most part they are held back by pusillanimity and a natural defect of courage, in which case you should make use of them, and of those among them more especially who are prudent, for they will do you honour in prosperity, and in adversity give you no cause for fear. But where they abstain from attaching themselves to you of set purpose and for ambitious ends, it is a sign that they are thinking more of themselves than of you, and against such men a Prince should be on his guard, and treat them as though they were declared enemies, for in his adversity they will always help to ruin him.

He who becomes a Prince through the favour of the people should always keep on good terms with them; which it is easy for him to do, since all they ask is not to be oppressed. But he who against the will of the people is made a Prince by the favour of the nobles, must, above all things, seek to conciliate the people, which he readily may by taking them under his protection. For since men who are well treated by one whom they expected to treat them ill, feel the more beholden to their benefactor, the people will at once become better disposed to such a Prince when he protects them, than if he owed his Princedom to them.

There are many ways in which a Prince may gain the good-will of the people, but, because these vary with circumstances, no certain rule can be laid down respecting them, and I shall, therefore, say no more about them. But this is the sum of the matter, that it is essential for a Prince to be on a friendly footing with his people, since, otherwise, he will have no resource in adversity. Nabis, Prince of Sparta, was attacked by the whole hosts of Greece and by a Roman army flushed with victory, and defended his country and crown against them; and when danger approached, there were but few of his subjects against whom he needed to guard himself, whereas had the people been hostile, this would not have been enough.

And what I affirm let no one controvert by citing the old saw that '*he who builds on the people builds on the mire*', for that may be true of a private citizen who presumes on his favour with the people, and counts on being rescued by them when overpowered by his enemies or by the magistrates. In such cases a man may often find himself deceived, as happened to the Gracchi in Rome, and in Florence to Messer Giorgio Scali. But when he who builds on the people is a Prince capable of command, of a spirit not to be cast down by ill-fortune, who, while he animates the whole community by his courage and bearing, neglects no prudent precaution, he will not find himself betrayed by the people, but will be seen to have laid his foundations well.

The most critical juncture for Princedoms of this kind, is at the moment when they are about to pass from the popular to the absolute form of government: and as these Princes exercise their authority either directly or through the agency of the magistrates, in the latter case their position is weaker and more hazardous, since they are wholly in the power of those citizens to whom the magistracies are entrusted, who can, and especially in difficult times, with the greatest ease deprive them of their authority, either by opposing, or by not obeying them. And in times of peril it is too late for a Prince to assume to himself an absolute authority, for the citizens and subjects who are accustomed to take their orders from the magistrates, will not when dangers threaten take them from the Prince, so that at such seasons there will always be very few in whom we can trust. Such Princes, therefore, must not build on what they see in tranquil times when the citizens feel the need of the State. For then every one is ready to run, to promise, and, danger of death being remote, even to die for the State. But in troubled times, when the State has need of its citizens, few of them are to be found. And the risk of the experiment is the greater in that it can only be made once. Wherefore, a wise Prince should devise means whereby his subjects may at all times, whether favourable or adverse, feel the need of the State and of him, and then they will always be faithful to him.

[...]

XIV: Of the duty of a Prince in respect of military affairs

A Prince, therefore, should have no care or thought but for war, and for the regulations and training it requires, and should apply himself exclusively to this as his peculiar province; for war is the sole art looked for in one who rules, and is of such efficacy that it not merely maintains those who are born Princes, but often enables men to rise to that eminence from a private station; while, on the other hand, we often see that when Princes devote themselves rather to pleasure than to arms, they lose their dominions. And as neglect of this art is the prime cause of such calamities, so to be a proficient in it is the surest way to acquire power. Francesco Sforza, from his renown in arms, rose from privacy to be Duke of Milan, while his descendants, seeking to avoid the hardships and fatigues of military life, from being Princes fell back into privacy. For among other causes of misfortune which your not being armed brings upon you, it makes you despised, and this is one of those reproaches against which, as shall presently be explained, a Prince ought most carefully to guard.

Between an armed and an unarmed man no proportion holds, and it is contrary to reason to expect that the armed man should voluntarily submit to him who is unarmed, or that the unarmed man should stand secure among armed retainers. For with contempt on one side, and distrust on the other, it is impossible that men should work well together. Wherefore, as has already been said, a Prince who is ignorant of military affairs, besides other disadvantages, can neither be respected by his soldiers, nor can he trust them. A Prince, therefore, ought never to allow his attention to be diverted from warlike pursuits, and should occupy himself with them even more in peace than in war. This he can do in two ways, by practice or by study.

As to the practice, he ought, besides keeping his soldiers well trained and disciplined, to be constantly engaged in the chase, that he may inure his body to hardships and fatigue, and gain at the same time a knowledge of places, by observing how the mountains slope, the valleys open, and the plains spread; acquainting himself with the characters of rivers and marshes, and giving the greatest attention to this subject. Such knowledge is useful to him in two ways; for first, he learns thereby to know his own country, and to understand better how it may be defended; and next, from his familiar acquaintance with its localities, he readily comprehends the character of other districts when obliged to observe them for the first time. For the hills, valleys, plains, rivers, and marshes of Tuscany, for example, have a certain resemblance to those elsewhere; so that from a knowledge of the natural features of that province, similar knowledge in respect of other provinces may readily be gained. The Prince who is wanting in this kind of knowledge, is wanting in the first qualification of a good captain, for by it he is taught how to surprise an enemy, how to choose an encampment, how to lead his army on a march, how to array it for battle, and how to post it to the best advantage for a siege.

Among the commendations which Philopoemon, Prince of the Achaians, has received from historians is this – that in times of peace he was always thinking of warfare, so that

when walking in the country with his friends he would often stop and talk with them on the subject [...] ‘If the enemy,’ he would say, ‘were posted on that hill, and we found ourselves here with our army, which of us would have the better position? How could we most safely and in the best order advance to meet them? If we had to retreat, what direction should we take? If they retired, how should we pursue?’ In this way he put to his friends, as he went along, all the contingencies that can befall an army. He listened to their opinions, stated his own, and supported them with reasons; and from his being constantly occupied with such meditations, it resulted, that when in actual command no complication could ever present itself with which he was not prepared to deal.

As to the mental training of which we have spoken, a Prince should read histories, and in these should note the actions of great men, observe how they conducted themselves in their wars, and examine the causes of their victories and defeats, so as to avoid the latter and imitate them in the former. And above all, he should, as many great men of past ages have done, assume for his models those persons who before his time have been renowned and celebrated, whose deeds and achievements he should constantly keep in mind, as it is related that Alexander the Great sought to resemble Achilles, Caesar Alexander, and Scipio Cyrus. And any one who reads the life of this last-named hero, written by Xenophon, recognizes afterwards in the life of Scipio, how much this imitation was the source of his glory, and how nearly in his chastity, affability, kindliness, and generosity, he conformed to the character of Cyrus as Xenophon describes it.

A wise Prince, therefore, should pursue such methods as these, never resting idle in times of peace, but strenuously seeking to turn them to account, so that he may derive strength from them in the hour of danger, and find himself ready should Fortune turn against him, to resist her blows.

XV: Of the qualities in respect of which men, and most of all Princes, are praised or blamed

It now remains for us to consider what ought to be the conduct and bearing of a Prince in relation to his subjects and friends. And since I know that many have written on this subject, I fear it may be thought presumptuous in me to write of it also; the more so, because in my treatment of it I depart from the views that others have taken.

But since it is my object to write what shall be useful to whosoever understands it, it seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them. For many Republics and Princedoms have been imagined that were never seen or known to exist in reality. And the manner in which we live, and that in which we ought to live, are things so wide asunder, that he who quits the one to betake himself to the other is more likely to destroy than to save himself; since any one who would act up to a perfect standard of goodness in everything, must be ruined among so many who are not good. It is essential,

therefore, for a Prince who desires to maintain his position, to have learned how to be other than good, and to use or not to use his goodness as necessity requires.

Laying aside, therefore, all fanciful notions concerning a Prince, and considering those only that are true. I say that all men when they are spoken of, and Princes more than others from their being set so high, are characterized by some one of those qualities which attach either praise or blame. Thus one is accounted liberal, another miserly (which word I use, rather than *avaricious*, to denote the man who is too sparing of what is his own, *avarice* being the disposition to take wrongfully what is another's); one is generous, another greedy; one cruel, another tender-hearted; one is faithless, another true to his word; one effeminate and cowardly, another high-spirited and courageous; one is courteous, another haughty; one impure, another chaste; one simple, another crafty; one firm, another facile; one grave another frivolous; one devout, another unbelieving; and the like. Every one, I know, will admit that it would be most laudable for a Prince to be endowed with all of the above qualities that are reckoned good; but since it is impossible for him to possess or constantly practice them all, the conditions of human nature not allowing it, he must be discreet enough to know how to avoid the infamy of those vices that would deprive him of his government, and, if possible, be on his guard also against those which might not deprive him of it; though if he cannot wholly restrain himself, he may with less scruple indulge in the latter. He need never hesitate, however, to incur the reproach of those vices without which his authority can hardly be preserved; for if he well consider the whole matter, he will find that there may be a line of conduct having the appearance of virtue, to follow which would be his ruin, and that there may be another course having the appearance of vice, by following which his safety and well-being are secured.

XVI: Of liberality and miserliness

Beginning, then, with the first of the qualities above noticed, I say that it may be a good thing to be reputed liberal, but, nevertheless, that liberality without the reputation of it is hurtful; because, though it be worthily and rightly used, still if it be not known, you escape not the reproach of its opposite vice. Hence, to have credit for liberality with the world at large, you must neglect no circumstance of sumptuous display; the result being, that a Prince of liberal disposition will consume his whole substance in things of this sort, and, after all, be obliged, if he would maintain his reputation for liberality, to burden his subjects with extraordinary taxes, and to resort to confiscations and all the other shifts whereby money is raised. But in this way he becomes hateful to his subjects, and growing impoverished is held in little esteem by any. So that in the end, having by his liberality offended many and obliged few, he is worse off than when he began, and is exposed to all his original dangers. Recognizing this, and endeavouring to retrace his steps, he at once incurs the infamy of miserliness.

A Prince, therefore, since he cannot without injury to himself practise the virtue of liberality so that it may be known, will not, if he be wise, greatly concern himself though he

be called miserly. Because in time he will come to be regarded as more and more liberal when it is seen that through his parsimony his revenues are sufficient that he is able to defend himself against any who make war on him; that he can engage in enterprises against others without burdening his subjects; and thus exercise liberality towards all from whom he does not take, whose number is infinite, while he is miserly in respect of those only to whom he does not give, whose number is few.

In our own days we have seen no Princes accomplish great results save those who have been accounted miserly. All others have been ruined. Pope Julius II, after availing himself of his reputation for liberality to arrive at the Papacy, made no effort to preserve that reputation when making war on the King of France, but carried on all his numerous campaigns without levying from his subjects a single extraordinary tax, providing for the increased expenditure out of his long-continued savings. Had the present King of Spain been accounted liberal, he never could have engaged or succeeded in so many enterprises.

A Prince, therefore, if he is enabled thereby to forbear from plundering his subjects, to defend himself, to escape poverty and contempt, and the necessity of becoming rapacious, ought to care little though he incur the reproach of miserliness, for this is one of those vices which enable him to reign. And should any object that Caesar by his liberality rose to power, and that many others have been advanced to the highest dignities from their having been liberal and so reputed, I reply, 'Either you are already a Prince or you seek to become one; in the former case liberality is hurtful, in the latter it is very necessary that you be thought liberal; Caesar was one of those who sought the sovereignty of Rome; but if after obtaining it he had lived on without retrenching his expenditure, he must have ruined the Empire.' And if it be further urged that many Princes reputed to have been most liberal have achieved great things with their armies, I answer that a Prince spends either what belongs to himself and his subjects, or what belongs to others; and that in the former case he ought to be sparing, but in the latter ought not to refrain from any kind of liberality. Because for a Prince who leads his armies in person and maintains them by plunder, pillage, and forced contributions, dealing as he does with the property of others this liberality is necessary, since otherwise he would not be followed by his soldiers. Of what does not belong to you or to your subjects you should, therefore, be a lavish giver as were Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander; for to be liberal with the property of others does not take from your reputation, but adds to it. What injures you is to give away what is your own. And there is no quality so self-destructive as liberality; for while you practise it you lose the means whereby it can be practised, and become poor and despised, or else, to avoid poverty, you become rapacious and hated. For liberality leads to one or other of these two results, against which, beyond all others, a Prince should guard.

Wherefore it is wiser to put up with the name of being miserly, which breeds ignominy, but without hate, than to be obliged, from the desire to be reckoned liberal, to incur the reproach of rapacity, which breeds hate as well as ignominy.

XVII: Of cruelty and clemency, and whether it is better to be loved or feared

Passing to the other qualities above referred to, I say that every Prince should desire to be accounted merciful and not cruel. Nevertheless, he should be on his guard against the abuse of this quality of mercy. Cesare Borgia was reputed cruel, yet his cruelty restored Romagna, united it, and brought it to order and obedience; so that if we look at things in their true light, it will be seen that he was in reality far more merciful than the people of Florence, who, to avoid the imputation of cruelty, suffered Pistoja to be torn to pieces by factions.

A Prince should therefore disregard the reproach of being thought cruel where it enables him to keep his subjects united and obedient. For he who quells disorder by a very few signal examples will in the end be more merciful than he who from too great leniency permits things to take their course and to result in rapine and bloodshed; for these hurt the whole State, whereas the severities of the Prince injure individuals only.

And for a new Prince, of all others, it is impossible to escape a name for cruelty, since new States are full of dangers. Wherefore Virgil, by the mouth of Dido, excuses the harshness of her reign on the plea that it was new, saying:—

A fate unkind, and newness in my reign
Compel me thus to guard a wide domain.

Nevertheless, the new Prince should not be too ready of belief, nor too easily set in motion; nor should he himself be the first to raise alarms; but should so temper prudence with kindness that too great confidence in others shall not throw him off his guard, nor groundless distrust render him insupportable.

And here comes in the question whether it is better to be loved rather than feared, or feared rather than loved. It might perhaps be answered that we should wish to be both; but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved. For of men it may generally be affirmed that they are thankless, fickle, false, studious to avoid danger, greedy of gain, devoted to you while you are able to confer benefits upon them, and ready, as I said before, while danger is distant, to shed their blood, and sacrifice their property, their lives, and their children for you; but in the hour of need they turn against you. The Prince, therefore, who without otherwise securing himself builds wholly on their professions is undone. For the friendships which we buy with a price, and do not gain by greatness and nobility of character, though they be fairly earned are not made good, but fail us when we have occasion to use them.

Moreover, men are less careful how they offend him who makes himself loved than him who makes himself feared. For love is held by the tie of obligation, which, because men are a sorry breed, is broken on every whisper of private interest; but fear is bound by the apprehension of punishment which never relaxes its grasp.

Nevertheless a Prince should inspire fear in such a fashion that if he do not win love he may escape hate. For a man may very well be feared and yet not hated, and this will be the case so long as he does not meddle with the property or with the women of his citizens and subjects. And if constrained to put any to death, he should do so only when there is manifest cause or reasonable justification. But, above all, he must abstain from the property of others. For men will sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony. Moreover, pretexts for confiscation are never to seek, and he who has once begun to live by rapine always finds reasons for taking what is not his; whereas reasons for shedding blood are fewer, and sooner exhausted.

But when a Prince is with his army, and has many soldiers under his command, he must needs disregard the reproach of cruelty, for without such a reputation in its Captain, no army can be held together or kept under any kind of control. Among other things remarkable in Hannibal this has been noted, that having a very great army, made up of men of many different nations and brought to fight in a foreign country, no dissension ever arose among the soldiers themselves, nor any mutiny against their leader, either in his good or in his evil fortunes. This we can ascribe to the transcendent cruelty, which, joined with numberless great qualities, rendered him at once venerable and terrible in the eyes of his soldiers; for without this reputation for cruelty these other virtues would not have produced the like results.

Unreflecting writers, indeed, while they praise his achievements, have condemned the chief cause of them; but that his other merits would not by themselves have been so efficacious we may see from the case of Scipio, one of the greatest Captains, not of his own time only but of all times of which we have record, whose armies rose against him in Spain from no other cause than his too great leniency in allowing them a freedom inconsistent with military strictness. With which weakness Fabius Maximus taxed him in the Senate House, calling him the corrupter of the Roman soldiery. Again, when the Locrians were shamefully outraged by one of his lieutenants, he neither avenged them, nor punished the insolence of his officer; and this from the natural easiness of his disposition. So that it was said in the Senate by one who sought to excuse him, that there were many who knew better how to refrain from doing wrong themselves than how to correct the wrong-doing of others. This temper, however, must in time have marred the name and fame even of Scipio, had he continued in it, and retained his command. But living as he did under the control of the Senate, this hurtful quality was not merely disguised, but came to be regarded as a glory.

Returning to the question of being loved or feared, I sum up by saying, that since his being loved depends upon his subjects, while his being feared depends upon himself, a wise Prince should build on what is his own, and not on what rests with others. Only, as I have said, he must do his utmost to escape hatred.

XVIII: How Princes should keep faith

Every one understands how praiseworthy it is in a Prince to keep faith, and to live uprightly and not craftily. Nevertheless, we see from what has taken place in our own days that Princes who have set little store by their word, but have known how to overreach men by their cunning, have accomplished great things, and in the end got the better of those who trusted to honest dealing.

Be it known, then, that there are two ways of contending, one in accordance with the laws, the other by force; the first of which is proper to men, the second to beasts. But since the first method is often ineffectual, it becomes necessary to resort to the second. A Prince should, therefore, understand how to use well both the man and the beast. And this lesson has been covertly taught by the ancient writers, who relate how Achilles and others of these old Princes were given over to be brought up and trained by Chiron the Centaur; since the only meaning of their having for instructor one who was half man and half beast is, that it is necessary for a Prince to know how to use both natures, and that the one without the other has no stability.

But since a Prince should know how to use the beast's nature wisely, he ought of beasts to choose both the lion and the fox; for the lion cannot guard himself from the toils, nor the fox from the wolves. He must therefore be a fox to discern toils, and a lion to drive off wolves.

To rely wholly on the lion is unwise; and for this reason a prudent Prince neither can nor ought to keep his word when to keep it is hurtful to him and the causes which led him to pledge it are removed. If all men of fortune turn, and, as I have already said, he ought not to quit good courses if he can help it, but should know how to follow evil courses if he must.

A Prince should therefore be very careful that nothing ever escapes his lips which is not replete with the five qualities above named, so that to see and hear him, one would think him the embodiment of mercy, good faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. And there is no virtue which it is more necessary for him to seem to possess than this last; because men in general judge rather by the eye than by the hand, for every one can see but few can touch. Every one sees what you seem, but few know what you are, and these few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many who have the majesty of the State to back them up.

Moreover, in the actions of all men, and most of all of Princes, where there is no tribunal to which we can appeal, we look to results. Wherefore if a Prince succeeds in establishing and maintaining his authority, the means will always be judged honourable and be approved by every one. For the vulgar are always taken by appearances and by results, and the world is made up of the vulgar, the few only finding room when the many have no longer ground to stand on.

A certain Prince of our own days, whose name it is as well not to mention, is always preaching peace and good faith, although the mortal enemy of both; and both, had he practised them as he preaches them, would, oftener than once, have lost him his kingdom and authority.

**XXV: What fortune can effect in human affairs,
and how she may be withstood**

I am not ignorant that many have been and are of the opinion that human affairs are so governed by Fortune and by God, that men cannot alter them by any prudence of theirs, and indeed have no remedy against them; and for this reason have come to think that it is not worth while to labour much about anything, but that they must leave everything to be determined by chance.

Often when I turn the matter over, I am in part inclined to agree with this opinion, which has had the readier acceptance in our own times from the great changes in things which we have seen, and every day see happen contrary to all human expectation. Nevertheless, that our free will be not wholly set aside, I think it may be the case that Fortune is the mistress of one half our actions, and yet leaves the control of the other half, or a little less, to ourselves. And I would liken her to one of those wild torrents which, when angry, overflow the plains, sweep away trees and houses, and carry off soil from one bank to throw it down upon the other. Every one flees before them, and yields to their fury without the least power to resist. And yet, though this be their nature, it does not follow that in seasons of fair weather, men cannot, by constructing weirs and moles, take such precautions as will cause them when again in flood to pass off by some artificial channel, or at least prevent their course from being so uncontrolled and destructive. And so it is with Fortune, who displays her might where there is no organized strength to resist her, and directs her onset where she knows that there is neither barrier nor embankment to confine her.

And if you look at Italy, which has been at once the seat of these changes and their cause, you will perceive that it is a field without embankment or barrier. For if, like Germany, France, and Spain, it had been guarded with sufficient skill, this inundation, if it ever came upon us, would never have wrought the violent changes which we have witnessed.

This I think enough to say generally touching resistance to Fortune. But confining myself more closely to the matter in hand, I note that one day we see a Prince prospering and the next day overthrown, without detecting any change in his nature or character. This, I believe, comes chiefly from a cause already dwelt upon, namely, that a Prince who rests wholly on Fortune is ruined when she changes. Moreover, I believe that he will prosper most whose mode of acting best adapts itself to the character of the times; and conversely that he will be unprosperous, with whose mode of acting the times do not accord. For we see that men in these matters which lead to the end that each has before him, namely, glory and wealth, proceed by different ways, one with caution, another with impetuosity, one with violence, another with subtlety, one with patience, another with its contrary; and that by one or other of these different courses each may succeed.

Again, of two who act cautiously, you shall find that one attains his end, the other not, and that two of different temperament, the one cautious, the other impetuous, are equally

successful. All which happens from no other cause than that the character of the times accords or does not accord with their methods of acting. And hence it comes, as I have already said, that two operating differently arrive at the same result, and two operating similarly, the one succeeds and the other not. On this likewise depend the vicissitudes of Fortune. For if to one who conducts himself with caution and patience, time and circumstances are propitious, so that his method of acting is good, he goes on prospering; but if these change he is ruined, because he does not change his method of acting.

For no man is found so prudent as to know how to adapt himself to these changes, both because he cannot deviate from the course to which nature inclines him, and because, having always prospered while adhering to one path, he cannot be persuaded that it would be well for him to forsake it. And so when occasion requires the cautious man to act impetuously, he cannot do so and is undone: whereas, had he changed his nature with time and circumstances, his fortune would have been unchanged.

Pope Julius II proceeded with impetuosity in all his undertakings, and found time and circumstances in such harmony with his mode of acting that he always obtained a happy result. Witness his first expedition against Bologna, when Messer Giovanni Bentivogli was yet living. The Venetians were not favourable to the enterprise; nor was the King of Spain. Negotiations respecting it with the King of France were still open. Nevertheless, the Pope with his wonted hardihood and impetuosity marched in person on the expedition, and by this movement brought the King of Spain and the Venetians to a check, the latter through fear, the former from his eagerness to recover the entire Kingdom of Naples; at the same time, he dragged after him the King of France, who, desiring to have the Pope for an ally in humbling the Venetians, on finding him already in motion saw that he could not refuse him his soldiers without openly offending him. By the impetuosity of his movements, therefore, Julius effected what no other Pontiff endowed with the highest human prudence could. For had he, as any other Pope would have done, put off his departure from Rome until terms had been settled and everything duly arranged, he never would have succeeded. For the King of France would have found a thousand pretexts to delay him, and the others would have menaced him with a thousand alarms. I shall not touch upon his other actions, which were all of a like character, and all of which had a happy issue, since the shortness of his life did not allow him to experience reverses. But if times had overtaken him, rendering a cautious line of conduct necessary, his ruin must have ensued, since he never could have departed from those methods to which nature inclined him.

To be brief, I say that since Fortune changes and men stand fixed in their old ways, they are prosperous so long as there is congruity between them, and the reverse when there is not. Of this, however, I am well persuaded, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious. For Fortune is a woman who to be kept under must be beaten and roughly handled; and we see

that she suffers herself to be more readily mastered by those who so treat her than by those who are more timid in their approaches. And always, like a woman, she favours the young, because they are less scrupulous and fiercer, and command her with greater audacity.