

CHAPTER 7

Machiavelli's World

The Italian Renaissance's most famous thinker, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), came to maturity in an age of chaos and uncertainty. The French invaded Italy in 1494; the invasion was followed by the Italian Wars, which pitted the Habsburgs of Germany and Spain against the Valois dynasty of France for control of the peninsula. In the words of one historian, “The nub of Machiavelli’s writing is in the plight of Italy.”

Born into an old but not well-to-do Florentine family, Machiavelli spent the first fourteen years of his adult life in the service of the Florentine state. As a diplomat in the field, he observed firsthand the power of the German emperor and the French monarch and the ruthless policies of the pope’s son, Cesare Borgia, in his attempts to pacify the Romagna in 1502. Distrustful of reliance on mercenary troops, Machiavelli oversaw the training of a Florentine militia as he became a major figure in the regime of Piero Soderini, who governed Florence as a republic following the expulsion of the Medici in 1494.

With the restoration of the Medicean rule upon the election of Giovanni de’ Medici as Pope Leo X in 1512, Soderini’s regime fell. Machiavelli was toppled with it and, after brief imprisonment and torture, was exiled to his family’s small farm outside Florence. There Machiavelli resolved to apply the lessons of politics he had learned as a statesman and the lessons of history he had gleaned from his readings about the ancients, especially Livy’s account of the history of the early Roman republic.

The result of his studies was one of the most influential books of advice to rulers ever written, *The Prince*. Machiavelli dedicated the treatise to members of the Medici dynasty, no doubt hoping to curry favors with the new rulers of Florence and win back his political office. But, *The Prince* was far more than simply a ploy to gain political preferment; it radically altered the conventions of the manual of political advice, Machiavelli saw politics in the context of problem solving and created a handbook that would provide effective solutions to contemporary problems, for which the answers from the older moral traditions of medieval Christianity and Roman Stoicism had proved inadequate. At the same time, Machiavelli was deeply indebted to the teachings of ancient moralists, who preached an ethic very different from his own. *The Prince* has been seen at two ends of a spectrum: as a callous political satire—an essay on how not to be a successful

prince—and as a useful, pragmatic, sometimes cynical guide to effective political rule. The truth probably lies somewhere in between.

The Prince was written by an experienced statesman, in the enforced leisure of political exile, who resolved to "tell it like it is." Machiavelli no doubt lamented the harshness of his prescriptions for princely success; the demands he placed on his prince were great—nothing less than the liberation of Italy by harnessing the vagaries of fortune. Indeed he clearly came to prefer the edifying classical past of the Roman republic—examined diligently and at length in his *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy*, which every student must take into account for a rounded picture of Machiavelli's thought. But Machiavelli's *Prince* demands attention as the most startling solution to the new imperatives facing Italian leadership in the early sixteenth century.

ESSAYS

Trained at Harvard in the diplomatic and political history of early modern Europe, Garrett Mattingly taught for many years at Columbia University, where his lectures were as famous for their sparkling wit as his books were for their grace and style combined with painstaking research. His famous essay reprinted here as the first selection sees *The Prince* as a prime specimen of political satire. In biting irony, Mattingly describes Machiavelli as deeply cynical, using Cesare Borgia, an example of a conspicuous "loser," as a famous instance of how not to rule as prince.

By contrast, Quentin Skinner, professor of political science at Cambridge University and an incisive student of early modern political thought, views *The Prince* as a serious and revolutionary work in the genre of advice handbooks for princes. Writing in the turbulent age of the French invasion and subsequent Italian Wars, Machiavelli called the old rules of conduct and morality inadequate for the new, dangerous, and unstable situations.

It is perhaps too simple to explain these conflicting interpretations as methods and sensibilities of the historian as opposed to the theorist. Nevertheless, both reveal the difficulty of interpreting Cesare Borgia as a model for the "new prince" and the possibility that *The Prince* can be interpreted as either a work of ironic resignation or a handbook for a new savior of Italy.

The Prince: Political Science or Political Satire?

GARRETT MATTINGLY

The reputation of Niccolò Machiavelli rests on a curious paradox, a paradox so conspicuous and so familiar that we have almost entirely forgotten it. After the collapse of the Florentine republic, which he had served faithfully for fourteen years, Machiavelli relieved the tedium of exile and idleness by taking up his pen. He wrote poems—verse, at least—and tales and plays, including one comedy which is a classic. But mostly he wrote about politics. He was mad about politics. He says in one of his letters that he had to talk about it; he could talk of nothing else. So, in short discourses and political fables, in a history of Florence, in a treatise on the art of war and, notably, in a series of discourses, nominally on the first ten books of Livy, he strove to pass on to his fellow countrymen the fruits of his experience, his reading and his meditation. These are solid works, earnest and thoughtful, often original and provocative. Scholars who have read them usually speak of them with great respect. But not many people ever look at them, and most of those who do have had their curiosity aroused by the one little book which everyone knows: *The Prince*.

The Prince is scarcely more than a pamphlet, a very minor fraction of its author's work, but it overshadows all the rest. Probably no book about politics was ever read more widely. Certainly none has been better known to people who have never read it. Everyone knows that Machiavelli recommended hypocrisy and ingratitude, meanness, cruelty, and treachery as the traits proper to princes. Everyone recognizes "Machiavellian" as an adjective for political conduct that combines diabolical cunning with a ruthless disregard for moral standards. But *The Prince* obsesses historians and political philosophers who know a good deal more about it than that. Its burning prose still casts a lurid glow over the whole landscape of Renaissance Italy: historians who ought to know better call the whole period "the age of Machiavelli" and describe it as if it were chiefly characterized by the kind of behavior on which *The Prince* dwells; and philosophers, undertaking to describe Machiavelli's political thought, after carefully apprising their readers of the greater weight and complexity of the *Discorsi* and his other writings, end up by choosing half or more of their quotations from one slender volume. But *the Prince* is a short book, and most people remember short books better than long ones. Moreover, *The Prince* is easily Machiavelli's best prose. Its sentences are crisp and pointed, free from the parenthetical explanations and qualifying clauses that punctuate and clog his other political writings. Its prose combines verve and bite with a glittering, deadly polish, like the swordplay of a champion fencer. It uses apt, suggestive images, symbols packed with overtones. For instance: A prince should behave sometimes like a beast, and among beasts he should combine the traits of the lion and the fox. It is studded with epigrams like "A man will forget the death of his father sooner than the loss of his

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this is written in such a conversational style -- more like a lecture than a historical article. What a refreshing change!

Machiavelli
adores
politics.

Prince
is much
the most
famous...

patrimony," epigrams which all seem to come out of some sort of philosophical Grand Guignol and, like the savage ironies of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, are rendered the more spine chilling by the matter-of-fact tone in which they are uttered. And this is where the paradox comes in. Although the method and most of the assumptions of *The Prince* are so much of a piece with Machiavelli's thought that the book could not have been written by anyone else, yet in certain important respects, including some of the most shocking of the epigrams, *The Prince* contradicts everything else Machiavelli ever wrote and everything we know about his life. . . .

The notion that *The Prince* is what it pretends to be, a scientific manual for tyrants, has to contend not only against Machiavelli's life but against his writings, as, of course, everyone who wants to use *The Prince* as a centerpiece in an exposition of Machiavelli's political thought has recognized. . . . The standard explanation has been that in the corrupt conditions of sixteenth-century Italy only a prince could create a strong state capable of expansion. The trouble with this is that it was chiefly because they widened their boundaries that Machiavelli preferred republics. In the *Discorsi* he wrote, "We know by experience that states have never signally increased either in territory or in riches except under a free government. The cause is not far to seek, since it is the well-being not of the individuals but of the community which makes the state great, and without question this universal well-being is nowhere secured save in a republic. . . . Popular rule is always better than the rule of princes." This is not just a casual remark. It is the main theme of the *Discorsi* and the basic assumption of all but one of Machiavelli's writings, as it was the basic assumption of his political career.

There is another way in which *The Prince* is a puzzling anomaly. In practically everything else Machiavelli wrote, he displayed the sensitivity and tact of the developed literary temperament. He was delicately aware of the tastes and probable reactions of his public. No one could have written that magnificent satiric soliloquy of Fra Timoteo in *Mandragola*, for instance, who had not an instinctive feeling for the response of an audience. But the effect of the publication of *The Prince* on the first several generations of its readers in Italy (outside of Florence) and in the rest of Europe was shock. It horrified, rebelled, [sic] and fascinated like a Medusa's head. A large part of the shock was caused, of course, by the cynical immorality of some of the proposals, but instead of appeasing revulsion and insinuating his new proposals as delicately as possible, Machiavelli seems to delight in intensifying the shock and deliberately employing devices to heighten it. Of these not the least effective is the way *The Prince* imitates, almost parodies, one of the best known and most respected literary forms of the three preceding centuries, the handbook of advice to princes.

This literary type was enormously popular. Its exemplars ran into the hundreds of titles of which a few, like St. Thomas' *De Regno* and Erasmus' *Institutio principis christiani*, are not quite unknown today. In some ways, Machiavelli's little treatise was just like all the other "Mirrors of Princes"; in other ways it was a diabolical burlesque of all of them, like a political Black Mass.

The shock was intensified again because Machiavelli deliberately addressed himself primarily to princes who have newly acquired their principalities and do not owe them either to inheritance or to the free choice of their countrymen. The short and ugly word for this kind of prince is "tyrant." Machiavelli never quite uses the

does Prince contradict everything else Machiavelli believes? (i.e. = satire?)

Machiavelli is a republican

- why is Machiavelli so obviously brutal in his very subtle?

1) Contradicts all his other writings, which praise republics. Machiavelli's usual subtle style, & awareness of audience.

word except in illustrations from classical antiquity, but he seems to delight in dancing all around it until even the dullest of his readers could not mistake his meaning. Opinions about the relative merits of republics and monarchies varied during the Renaissance, depending mainly upon where one lived, but about tyrants there was only one opinion. Cristoforo Landino, Lorenzo the Magnificent's teacher and client, stated the usual view in his commentary on Dante, written when Niccolò Machiavelli was a child. When he came to comment on Brutus and Cassius in the lowest circle of hell, Landino wrote: "Surely it was extraordinary cruelty to inflict such severe punishment on those who faced death to deliver their country from slavery, a deed for which, if they had been Christians, they would have merited the most honored seats in the highest heaven. If we consult the laws of any well-constituted republic, we shall find them to decree no greater reward to anyone than to the man who kills the tyrant." So said the Italian Renaissance with almost unanimous voice. If Machiavelli's friends were meant to read the manuscript of *The Prince* and if they took it at face value—an objective study of how to be a successful tyrant offered as advice to a member of the species—they can hardly have failed to be deeply shocked. And if the manuscript was meant for the eye of young Giuliano de' Medici alone, he can hardly have been pleased to find it blandly assumed that he was one of a class of whom his father's tutor had written that the highest duty of a good citizen was to kill them.

The literary fame of *The Prince* is due, precisely, to its shocking quality, so if the book was seriously meant as a scientific manual, it owes its literary reputation to an artistic blunder. And if it was meant for a Medici prince, it has at its core an even more inexplicable piece of tactlessness. For to the Medici prince, "to a new prince established by fortune and the arms of others," Machiavelli offers Cesare Borgia as a model. There was just enough truth to the suggestion that Giuliano de' Medici owed his principate "to the arms of others"—after all, it was the Spanish troops who overthrew the republic as it was French troops who established Cesare in the Romagna—to be wounding. There was just enough cogency in the comparison between the duke of Valentinois, a pope's son, and the duke of Nemours, a pope's brother, to make it stick. These things merely heightened the affront. A Medici, of a family as old and as illustrious as any in Florence, a man whose great-grandfather, grandfather, and father had each in turn been acknowledged the first citizen of the republic and who now aspired to no more than to carry on their tradition (or so he said) was being advised to emulate a foreigner, a Spaniard, a bastard, convicted, in the court of public opinion anyway, of fratricide, incest, and a long role of abominable crimes, a man specially hated in Tuscany for treachery and extortion and for the gross misconduct of his troops on neutral Florentine soil, and a man, to boot, who as a prince had been a notorious and spectacular failure.

whew!!

This almost forgotten fact lies at the heart of the mystery of *The Prince*. We remember what Machiavelli wrote about Cesare in his most famous work, and we forget what Cesare was. But in 1513 most Italians would not have forgotten the events of 1503, and unless we assume that Machiavelli himself had forgotten what he himself had reported ten or eleven years before, we can scarcely believe that his commendation of the Borgia was seriously meant. If we take *The Prince* as an objective, scientific description of political reality, we must face contradiction not only by

would hardly have endeared him to Medici; if they were tyrants contradicts well-known, established facts of history & Borgia's character. Machiavelli's comparison of him w/ sleeky Cesare Borgia

I am hated all tyrants - yet Machiavelli clearly approves.

yes

yes

yes

yes!!

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

what we know of Machiavelli's political career, of his usual opinions and of his literary skill, but also by the facts of history as reported by, among others, Machiavelli himself.

Let us take just a few instances, the crucial ones. Relying on assertions in Chapter Seven of *The Prince*, most historians in the past hundred years have written as if the Borgia had restored peace and order in the Romagna, unified its government and won the allegiance of its inhabitants. Part of the time this must have been going on, Machiavelli was an envoy in the duke's camp. Although he does warn the signory repeatedly that Valentino is a formidable ruffian, daring, unscrupulous, and of unlimited ambition, he never mentions these statesmanlike achievements—nor do any of the other reports from observers in the area, Spanish, French, Venetian, Sienese; nor do any other contemporary sources. All the indications are quite contrary. The most probing recent study of Valentino's career, Gabriele Pepe's *La Politica dei Borgia*, sums the matter up by saying that the duke did nothing to end factional strife and anarchy in the Romagna; he merely superimposed the brutal rule of his Spanish captains on top of it.

ex's where P contradictions M's other statements on identical topics

We can make a concrete check on a related instance. After saying in Chapter Thirteen that the duke had used first French troops, then mercenaries under condottieri captains and then his own men, Machiavelli comments, "He was never esteemed more highly than when everyone saw that he was complete master of his own forces." But in the *Legazione*, Machiavelli never once refers to the military capacity of the duke or praises the courage or discipline of his army. Instead, as late as December 14, 1502, he writes from Imola of the troops under Cesare's own command: "They have devoured everything here except the stones . . . here in the Romagna they are behaving just as they did in Tuscany last year [of their passage then, Landucci had noted in his diary that none of the foreign armies that had crossed Tuscany in the past seven years had behaved so abominably as these Italians under the papal banner] and they show no more discipline and no less confusion than they did then." There is no subsequent indication that Machiavelli ever changed his mind.

Borgia line mean + cruel

Nowhere is *The Prince* more at odds with the facts of history or with Machiavelli's own previous judgments than in the famous concluding passage of Chapter Seven on which any favorable opinion of Cesare's statecraft must be based. The passage in *The Prince* reads: "On the day Pope Julius II was elected, the Duke told me that he had thought of everything that might happen on the death of his father and provided for everything except that when his father died he himself would be at death's door . . . only the shortness of the life of Alexander and his own sickness frustrated his designs. Therefore he who wants to make sure of a new principality . . . cannot find a better model than the actions of this man." Could Machiavelli have believed this in 1513? He certainly did not believe it in 1503. He did not even record then that Cesare ever said anything of the sort; and though it would not be unlike some of the duke's whimperings, he could not have said it on the day of Julius II's election, when he was boasting to everyone that the new pope would obey him. In any case, Machiavelli would have believed what, in *The Prince*, he said the duke said, as little as he believed the bluster that, in 1503, he actually reported. By November of 1503, nobody could have believed it. In fact, even in August, when Alex-

6) again, M.'s depiction of C. Borgia contradicts his own reports 10 yrs earlier

ander VI died, at the age of seventy-two after a papacy of eleven years (not such a short life and not such a short reign), most people in Rome, including all of the ambassadors whose reports survive and most of the cardinals with whom they had talked, felt sure Cesare was finished [He had always ridden on his father's shoulders, and he was hated, feared, and despised even by most of the faction who had stood by the old pope. No one trusted him, and there was no one he could trust.] No pope would dare support him, and without papal support his principate was built on quicksand. He had never, in fact, faced this eventual predicament, and he did not face it when it arose. It is true that he was ill in August with a bout of malaria, but not too ill to stall the election and then maneuver the choice of the old and ailing Pius III, thus delaying an unavoidable doom. Julius II was not elected until November. In all those months and even after the election, Italy was treated through the eyes of its ambassadors to the spectacle of the terrible Borgia duke writhing in an agony of indecision, now about to go to Genoa to raise money, now ready to start for an interview with the king of France, now on the point of leading his troops back to the Romagna, but in fact hovering about the curia, plucking the sleeves of cardinals and bowing and smiling to envoys he used to bully, sometimes swaggering through the streets with the powerful armed guard he felt he needed to protect him from the vengeance of the Orsini, sometimes shaking beneath bedclothes with what might have been fever and might have been funk. We catch a glimpse of him at midnight in the chamber of Guidobaldo de Montefeltro, the duke of Urbino, who had been newly restored to his former estates by the loyalty of his subjects, and to his former rank of *gonfaloniere* [standard-bearer] of the church by the new pope. There Cesare kneels on the floor, sobbing in pure terror, begging the old friend whom he had betrayed and robbed, with incredible meanness, not just of his duchy, but of his books and his antique medals, not to kill him, please not to kill him, to leave him at least his life, until Guidobaldo, beyond any feeling about this curious monster, says he does not wish to kill him; he only wishes him to go away.

+truth about Cesare Borgia, which Mach. knew -- then why does he suddenly know his mind?

Cesare was hated by everyone.

Shortly thereafter Cesare slinks off to Naples and imprisonment, followed by the scornful laughter of Italy. For nothing is more absurd than the great straw-stuffed giants of carnival, and when such a giant has for a season frightened all Italy, the laughter is that much the louder. Machiavelli was one of the ambassadors in Rome. He knew all this as well as anyone. One can read in dispatches his growing impatience with the duke, his growing contempt for Cesare's wild talk, aimless shifts of plan, alternate blustering and whining. "The duke, who never kept faith with anyone," he wrote, "is now obliged to rely on the faith of others." And later, "The duke, who never showed mercy, now finds mercy his only hope." Later in his historical poem, *Decennali*, Machiavelli made his distaste for the Borgia clear enough. Did he really mean to propose him in 1513 as a model prince? Was he writing as a friend of tyrants or as a dispassionate scientific observer when he said he did? . . .

To read *The Prince* as satire not only clears up puzzles and resolves contradictions; it gives a new dimension and meaning to passages unremarkable before. Take the place in the dedication that runs "just as those who paint landscapes must seat themselves below in the plains to see the mountains, and high in the mountains to see the plains, so to understand the nature of the people one must be a prince, and to understand the nature of a prince, one must be one of the people." In the usual view,

8) Prince-as-satire opens up new interpretations.

this is a mere rhetorical flourish, but the irony, once sought, is easy to discover, for Machiavelli, in fact, takes both positions. The people can only see the prince as, by nature and necessity, false, cruel, mean, and hypocritical. The prince, from his lofty but precarious perch, dare not see the people as other than they are described in Chapter Seventeen: "ungrateful, fickle, treacherous, cowardly, and greedy. As long as you succeed they are yours entirely. They will offer you their blood, property, lives, and children when you do not need them. When you do need them, they will turn against you." Probably Machiavelli really believed that this, or something like it, happened to the human nature of a tyrant and his subjects. But the view, like its expression, is something less than objective and dispassionate, and the only lesson it has for princes would seem to be: "Run for your life!"

Considering the brevity of the book, the number of times its princely reader is reminded, as in the passage just quoted, that his people will overthrow him at last is quite remarkable. Cities ruled in the past by princes easily accustom themselves to a change of master, Machiavelli says in Chapter Five, but "in republics there is more vitality, greater hatred, and more desire for vengeance. They cannot forget their lost liberty, so that the safest way is to destroy them—or to live there." He does not say what makes that safe. And most notably, with savage irony, "the duke [Borgia] was so able and laid such firm foundations . . . that the Romagna [after Alexander VI's death] waited for him more than a month." This is as much as to put Leo X's brother on notice that without papal support he can expect short shrift. If the Romagna, accustomed to tyranny, waited only a month before it rose in revolt, how long will Florence wait? Tactlessness like this is unintelligible unless it is deliberate, unless these are not pedantic blunders but sarcastic ironies, taunts flung at the Medici, incitements to the Florentines.

Only in a satire can one understand the choice of Cesare Borgia as the model prince. The common people of Tuscany could not have had what they could expect of a prince's rule made clearer than by the example of this bloodstained buffoon whose vices, crimes, and follies had been the scandal of Italy, and the conduct of whose brutal, undisciplined troops had so infuriated the Tuscans that when another band of them crossed their frontier, the peasants fell upon them and tore them to pieces. The Florentine aristocrats on whom Giovanni and cousin Giulio were relying to bridge the transition to despotism would have shared the people's revulsion to Cesare, and they may have been rendered somewhat more thoughtful by the logic of the assumption that nobles were more dangerous to a tyrant than commoners and should be dealt with as Cesare had dealt with the petty lords of the Romagna. Moreover, they could scarcely have avoided noticing the advice to use some faithful servant to terrorize the rest, and then to sacrifice him to escape the obloquy of his conduct, as Cesare had sacrificed Captain Remirro. As for the gentle, mild-mannered, indolent Giuliano de Medici himself, he was the last man to be attracted by the notion of imitating the Borgia. He wanted no more than to occupy the same social position in Florence that his magnificent father had held, and not even that if it was too much trouble. Besides, in the days of the family's misfortunes, Giuliano had found shelter and hospitality at the court of Guidobaldo de Montefeltro. Giuliano lived at Urbino for many years (there is a rather charming picture of him there in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*), and all his life he cherished deep gratitude and a strong affection for Duke Guidobaldo. He must have felt, then, a special loathing for the

yes!
a) why would he show many ex's of a Republic rising against its leader?

10) Giuliano is far removed from C. Borgia.
11) Giuliano was a great friend of the Montefeltro.

foreign ruffian who had betrayed and plundered his patron, and Machiavelli must have known that he did. Only a wish to draw the most odious comparison possible, only a compulsion to wound and insult, could have led Machiavelli to select the Borgia as the prime exemplar in his "Mirror of Princes."

There is one last famous passage that reads differently if we accept *The Prince* as satire. On any other hypothesis, the final exhortation to free Italy from the barbarians sounds at best like empty rhetoric, at worst like calculating but stupid flattery. Who could really believe that the lazy, insipid Giuliano or his petty, vicious successor were the liberators Italy awaited? But if we have heard the mordant irony and sarcasm of the preceding chapters and detected the overtones of hatred and despair, then this last chapter will be charged with an irony turned inward, the bitter mockery of misdirected optimism. For before the Florentine republic had been gored to death by Spanish pikes, Machiavelli had believed, as he was to believe again, that a free Florentine republic could play the liberator's role. Perhaps, since he was all his life a passionate idealist, blind to reality when his desires were strong, Machiavelli may not have given up that wild hope even when he wrote *The Prince*. If he had not, then the verses at the end take on a new meaning, clearer perhaps to his contemporaries than they can be to us.

Virtù contro a furore
[Valor against wild rage]
Prenderà l'arme, e fia il combatter corto;
[Will take up arms, and the combat will be short;]
Chè l'antico valore
[Because ancestral courage]
Nell'italici cor non è ancor morto.
[In our Italian hearts is not yet dead.]

warning bell
alarm

The antique valor Petrarch appealed to was, after all, that of republican Rome. Perhaps that first sharp combat was not to be against the barbarians.

However that may be, we must agree that if *The Prince* was meant as a satire, as a taunt and challenge to the Medici and a coax to the people of Florence, then it must have been recognized as such by the Florentine literati and by the Medici themselves. If so we have the solution to two minor puzzles connected with this puzzling book. A rasher ruling family than the Medici might have answered the challenge by another round of torture and imprisonment or by a quiet six inches of steel under the fifth rib. But brother Giovanni and brother Giovanni's familiar spirit, cousin Giulio, though in fact they were aiming at exactly the kind of despotism that Machiavelli predicted, hoped to achieve it with a minimum of trouble by preserving for the time being the forms of the republic. It would not do, by punishing the author, to admit the pertinence of his satire. So the Medici did nothing. But they were not a stupid family, and they cannot have been very pleased. This would explain some puzzling things: why, for example, the ardent republicans among Machiavelli's friends, like Zanobi Buondelmonti, were not alienated by *The Prince*, and why the former republicans in Medici service among his correspondents, like Vettori, for instance, refer to it so seldom and with such muffled embarrassment. It would also explain why, among all the manuscripts of *The Prince* dating from Machiavelli's lifetime (and it seems to have had a considerable circulation and to have been multi-

yes
12) If it were a joke, he would not have ever given Giulio a copy.
13) " " " " " , it would have embarrassed his friends.

plied by professional copyists), we have never found the copy which should have had the best chance of preservation—I mean that copy, beautifully lettered on vellum and richly bound, presented with its dedication to the Medici prince. Not only is it absent from the Laurentian library now, there is no trace that it was ever there. There is no evidence that it ever existed. Probably Machiavelli figured that the joke was not worth the extra expense. *A stunning essay, arguing that Mach. wrote the Prince as a joke, a satire vs. Medici, not as a serious work.*

Machiavelli's Advice to Princes

QUENTIN SKINNER

Arma virumque coman

Arms and the man: these are Machiavelli's two great themes in *The Prince*. The other lesson he accordingly wishes to bring home to the rulers of his age is that, in addition to having a sound army, a prince who aims to scale the heights of glory must cultivate the right qualities of princely leadership. The nature of these qualities had already been influentially analysed by the Roman moralists. They had argued in the first place that all great leaders need to some extent to be fortunate. For unless Fortune happens to smile, no amount of unaided human effort can hope to bring us to our highest goals. . . . They also maintained that a special range of characteristics—those of the *vir* [man]—tend to attract the favourable attentions of Fortune, and in this way almost guarantee us the attainment of honour, glory and fame. The assumptions underlying this belief are best summarised by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*. He declares that, if we act from a thirst for *virtus* without any thought of winning glory as a result, this will give us the best chance of winning glory as well, provided that Fortune smiles; for glory is *virtus* rewarded.

Skinner sets out background to Mach.

- Classical

This analysis was taken over without alteration by the humanists of Renaissance Italy. By the end of the fifteenth century, an extensive genre of humanist advice-books for princes had grown up, and had reached an unprecedentedly wide audience through the new medium of print. Such distinguished writers as Bartolomeo Sacchi, Giovanni Pontano and Francesco Patrizi all wrote treatises for the guidance of new rulers, all of which were founded on the same basic principle: that the possession of *virtus* is the key to princely success. As Pontano rather grandly proclaims in his tract on *The Prince*, any ruler who wishes to attain his noblest ends "must rouse himself to follow the dictates of *virtus*" in all his public acts. *Virtus* is "the most splendid thing in the world," more magnificent even than the sun, for "the blind cannot see the sun" whereas "even they can see *virtus* as plainly as possible."

Predecessors to Mach. & mirrors for princes.

150 both emphasize "virtu", as does Mach

Machiavelli reiterates precisely the same beliefs about the relations between *virtu*, Fortune and the achievement of princely goals. He first makes these humanist allegiances clear in chapter 6 of *The Prince*, where he argues that "in principedoms

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wholly new, where the prince is new, there is more or less difficulty in keeping them, according as the prince who acquires them is more or less *virtuoso*." This is later corroborated in chapter 24, the aim of which is to explain "Why the princes of Italy have lost their states." Machiavelli insists that they "should not blame Fortune" for their disgrace, because "she only shows her power" when men of *virtu* "do not prepare to resist her." Their losses are simply due to their failure to recognise that "those defences alone are good" which "depend on yourself and your own *virtu*." Finally, the role of *virtu* is again underlined in chapter 26, the impassioned "Exhortation" to liberate Italy that brings *The Prince* to an end. At this point Machiavelli reverts to the incomparable leaders mentioned in chapter 6 for their "amazing *virtu*"—Moses, Cyrus and Theseus. He implies that nothing less than a union of their astonishing abilities with the greatest good Fortune will enable Italy to be saved. And he adds—in an uncharacteristic moment of preposterous flattery—that the "glorious family" of the Medici luckily possess all the requisite qualities: they have tremendous *virtu*; they are immensely favoured by Fortune; and they are no less "favoured by God and by the Church."

virtu is given by Mach.

(+) of Medici.

adding "virtu"

It is often complained that Machiavelli fails to provide any definition of *virtu*, and even that (as [J.H.] Whitfield puts it) he is "innocent of any systematic use of the word." But it will now be evident that he uses the term with complete consistency. Following his classical and humanist authorities, he treats it as that quality which enables a prince to withstand the blows of Fortune, to attract the goddess's favour, and to rise in consequence to the heights of princely fame, winning honour and glory for himself and security for his government.

virtu is for Mach.

It still remains, however, to consider what particular characteristics are to be expected in a man of *virtuoso* capacities. The Roman moralists had bequeathed a complex analysis of the concept of *virtus*, generally picturing the true *vir* as the possessor of three distinct yet affiliated sets of qualities. They took him to be endowed in the first place with the four "cardinal" virtues of wisdom, justice, courage and temperance—the virtues that Cicero (following Plato) begins by singling out in the opening sections of *Moral Obligation*. But they also credited him with an additional range of qualities that later came to be regarded as peculiarly "princely" in nature. The chief of these—the pivotal virtue of Cicero's *Moral Obligation*—was what Cicero called "honesty," meaning a willingness to keep faith and deal honourably with all men at all times. This was felt to need supplementing by two further attributes, both of which were described in *Moral Obligation*, but were more extensively analysed by Seneca, who devoted special treatises to each of them. One was princely magnanimity, the theme of Seneca's *On Mercy*; the other was liberality, one of the major topics discussed in Seneca's *On Benefits*. Finally, the true *vir* was said to be characterised by his steady recognition of the fact that, if we wish to reach the goals of honour and glory, we must always be sure to behave as virtuously as possible. This contention—that it is always rational to be moral—lies at the heart of Cicero's *Moral Obligation*. He observes in Book II that many men believe "that a thing may be morally right without being expedient, and expedient without being morally right." But this is an illusion, for it is only by moral methods that we can hope to attain the objects of our desires. Any appearances to the contrary are wholly deceptive, for "expediency can never conflict with moral rectitude." . . .

other classical elements of a princely character

Classical authors describe needed princely virtues, which are always good ones. But Machiavelli - - - - -

So Mach. runs directly against most of the classical advice.

Context

Machiavelli's criticism of classical and contemporary humanism is thus a simple but devastating one. He argues that, if a ruler wishes to reach his highest goals, he will not always find it rational to be moral; on the contrary, he will find that any consistent attempt to "practise all those things for which men are considered good" will prove a ruinously irrational policy. But what of the Christian objection that this is a foolish as well as a wicked position to adopt, since it forgets the day of judgement on which all injustices will finally be punished? About this Machiavelli says nothing at all. His silence is eloquent, indeed epoch-making; it echoed around Christian Europe, at first eliciting a stunned silence in return, and then a howl of execration that has never finally died away.

good pt.

If princes ought not to conduct themselves according to the dictates of conventional morality, how ought they to conduct themselves? Machiavelli's response—the core of his positive advice to new rulers—is given at the beginning of chapter 15. A wise prince will be guided above all by the dictates of necessity: "in order to hold his position," he "must acquire the power to be not good, and understand when to use it and when not to use it" as circumstances direct. Three chapters later, this basic doctrine is repeated. A wise prince "holds to what is right when he can," but he "knows how to do wrong when this is necessitated." Moreover, he must reconcile himself to the fact that "he will often be necessitated" to act "contrary to truth, contrary to charity, contrary to humanity, contrary to religion" if he wishes "to maintain his government."

Prince must be able to be BAD

... The crucial importance of this insight was first put to Machiavelli at an early stage in his diplomatic career. It was after conversing with the cardinal of Volterra in 1503, and with Pandolfo Petrucci some two years later, that he originally felt impelled to record what was later to become his central political belief: that the clue to successful statecraft lies in recognising the force of circumstances, accepting what necessity dictates, and harmonising one's behaviour with the times. A year after Pandolfo gave him this recipe for princely success, we find Machiavelli putting forward a similar set of observations as his own ideas for the first time. While stationed at Perugia in September 1506, watching the astonishing progress of Julius II's campaign, he fell to musing in a letter to his friend Giovanni Soderini about the reasons for triumph and disaster in civil and military affairs. "Nature," he declares, "has given every man a particular talent and inspiration" which "controls each one of us." But "the times are varied" and "subject to frequent change," so that "those who fail to alter their ways of proceeding" are bound to encounter "good Fortune at one time and bad at another." The moral is obvious: if a man wishes "always to enjoy good Fortune," he must "be wise enough to accommodate himself to the times." Indeed, if everyone were "to command his nature" in this way, and "match his way of proceeding with his age," then "it would genuinely come true that the wise man would be the ruler of the stars and of the fates."

go with the flow

M. recognises flexibility as the key

Writing *The Prince* seven years later, Machiavelli virtually copied out these "Caprices," as he deprecatingly called them, in his chapter on the role of Fortune in human affairs. Everyone, he says, likes to follow his own particular bent: one person acts "with caution, another impetuously; one by force, the other with skill." But in the meantime, "times and affairs change," so that a ruler who "does not change his way of proceeding" will be bound sooner or later to encounter ill-luck. However, if

Mach. advocates flexible response to times.

"he could change his nature with times and affairs, Fortune would not change." So the successful prince will always be the one "who adapts his way of proceeding to the nature of the times."

By now it will be evident that the revolution Machiavelli engineered in the genre of advice-books for princes was based in effect on redefining the pivotal concept of *virtù*. He endorses the conventional assumption that *virtù* is the name of that congeries of qualities which enables a prince to ally with Fortune and obtain honour, glory and fame. But he divorces the meaning of the term from any necessary connection with the cardinal and princely virtues. He argues instead that the defining characteristic of a truly *virtuoso* prince will be a willingness to do whatever is dictated by necessity—whether the action happens to be wicked or virtuous—in order to attain his highest ends. So *virtù* comes to denote precisely the requisite quality of moral flexibility in a prince: "he must have a mind ready to turn in any direction as Fortune's winds and the variability of affairs require."

Mach. dumps cardinal virtues, emphasises adaptability instead.

Machiavelli takes some pains to point out that this conclusion opens up an unbridgeable gulf between himself and the whole tradition of humanist political thought, and does so in his most savagely ironic style. To the classical moralists and their innumerable followers, moral virtue had been the defining characteristic of the *vir*, the man of true manliness. Hence to abandon virtue was not merely to act irrationally; it was also to abandon one's status as a man and descend to the level of the beasts. As Cicero had put it in Book I of *Moral Obligation*, there are two ways in which wrong may be done, either by force or by fraud. Both, he declares, "are bestial" and "wholly unworthy of man"—force because it typifies the lion and fraud because it "seems to belong to the cunning fox."

Mach. - v. classical

To Machiavelli, by contrast, it seemed obvious that manliness is not enough. There are indeed two ways of acting, he says at the start of chapter 18, of which "the first is suited to man, the second to the animals." But "because the first is often not sufficient, a prince must resort to the second." One of the things a prince therefore needs to know is which animals to imitate. Machiavelli's celebrated advice is that he will come off best if he "chooses among the beasts the fox and the lion," supplementing the ideals of manly decency with the indispensable arts of force and fraud. This conception is underlined in the next chapter, in which Machiavelli discusses one of his favourite historical characters, the Roman emperor Septimius Severus. First he assures us that the emperor was "a man of very great *virtù*." And then, explaining the judgement, he adds that Septimius' great qualities were those of "a very savage lion and a very tricky fox," as a result of which he was "feared and respected by everybody."

Machiavelli rounds off his analysis by indicating the lines of conduct to be expected from a truly *virtuoso* prince. In chapter 19 he puts the point negatively, stressing that such a ruler will never do anything worthy of contempt, and will always take the greatest care "to avoid everything that makes him hated." In chapter 21 the positive implications are then spelled out. Such a prince will always act "without reservation" towards his allies and enemies, boldly standing forth "as a vigorous supporter of one side." At the same time, he will seek to present himself to his subjects as majestically as possible, doing "extraordinary things" and keeping them "always in suspense and wonder, watching for the outcome."

Skinner obviously takes Mach at his word, & strives to show how his writings make perfect sense.

In the light of this account, it is easy to understand why Machiavelli felt such admiration for Cesare Borgia and wished to hold him up—despite his obvious limitations—as a pattern of *virtù* for other new princes. For Borgia had demonstrated, on one terrifying occasion, that he understood perfectly the paramount importance of avoiding the hatred of the people while at the same time keeping them in awe. The occasion was when he realised that his government of the Romagna, in the capable but tyrannical hands of Remirro de Orco, was falling into the most serious danger of all, that of becoming an object of hatred to those living under it. . . . Machiavelli was an eye-witness of Borgia's cold-blooded solution to the dilemma: the summary murder of Remirro and the exhibition of his body in the public square as a sacrifice to the people's rage.

Machiavelli's belief in the imperative need to avoid popular hatred and contempt should perhaps be dated from this moment. But even if the duke's action merely served to corroborate his own sense of political realities, there is no doubt that the episode left him deeply impressed. When he came to discuss the issues of hatred and contempt in *The Prince*, this was precisely the incident he recalled in order to illustrate his point. He makes it clear that Borgia's action had struck him on reflection as being profoundly right. It was resolute; it took courage; and it brought about exactly the desired effect, since it left the people "gratified and awestruck" while at the same time removing their "cause for hatred." Summing up in his iciest tones, Machiavelli remarks that the duke's conduct seems to him, as usual, to be "worthy of notice and of being copied by others."

Machiavelli is fully aware that his new analysis of princely *virtù* raises some new difficulties. He states the main dilemma in the course of chapter 15: on the one hand, a prince must "acquire the power to be not good" and exercise it whenever this is dictated by necessity; but on the other hand, he must be careful not to acquire the reputation of being a wicked man, because this will tend to "take his position away from him" instead of securing it. The problem is thus to avoid appearing wicked even when you cannot avoid behaving wickedly.

Moreover, the dilemma is even sharper than this implies, for the true aim of the prince is not merely to secure his position, but is of course to win honour and glory as well. As Machiavelli indicates in recounting the story of Agathocles, the tyrant of Sicily, this greatly intensifies the predicament in which any new ruler finds himself. Agathocles, we are told, "lived a wicked life" at every stage of his career and was known as a man of "outrageous cruelty and inhumanity." These attributes brought him immense success, enabling him to rise from "low and abject Fortune" to become king of Syracuse and hold on to his principality "without any opposition from the citizens." But as Machiavelli warns us, in a deeply revealing phrase, such unashamed cruelties may bring us "sovereignty, but not glory." Although Agathocles was able to maintain his state by means of these qualities, "they cannot be called *virtù* and they do not permit him to be honoured among the noblest men."

Finally, Machiavelli refuses to admit that the dilemma can be resolved by setting stringent limits to princely wickedness, and in general behaving honourably towards one's subjects and allies. This is exactly what one cannot hope to do, because all men at all times "are ungrateful, changeable, simulators and dissimulators,

Compare
w/
Machiavelli

runaways in danger, eager for gain," so that "a prince who bases himself entirely on their word, if he is lacking in other preparations, falls." The implication is that "a prince, and above all a prince who is new" will often—not just occasionally—find himself forced by necessity to act "contrary to humanity" if he wishes to keep his position and avoid being deceived.

These are acute difficulties, but they can certainly be overcome. The prince need only remember that, although it is not necessary to have all the qualities usually considered good, it is "very necessary to appear to have them." It is good to be considered liberal; it is sensible to seem merciful and not cruel; it is essential in general to be "thought to be of great merit." The solution is thus to become "a great simulator and dissimulator," learning "how to addle the brains of men with trickery" and make them believe in your pretence.

Machiavelli had received an early lesson in the value of addling men's brains. . . . He had been present when the struggle developed between Cesare Borgia and Julius II in the closing months of 1503, and it is evident that the impressions he carried away from that occasion were still uppermost in his mind when he came to write about the question of dissimulation in *The Prince*. He immediately refers back to the episode he had witnessed, using it as his main example of the need to remain constantly on one's guard against princely duplicity. Julius, he recalls, managed to conceal his hatred of Borgia so cleverly that he caused the duke to fall into the egregious error of believing that "men of high rank forget old injuries." He was then able to put his powers of dissimulation to decisive use. Having won the papal election with Borgia's full support, he suddenly revealed his true feelings, turned against the duke and "caused his final ruin." Borgia certainly blundered at this point, and Machiavelli feels that he deserved to be blamed severely for his mistake. He ought to have known that a talent for addling men's brains is part of the armoury of any successful prince.

Machiavelli cannot have been unaware, however, that in recommending the arts of deceit as the key to success he was in danger of sounding too glib. More orthodox moralists had always been prepared to consider the suggestion that hypocrisy might be used as a short cut to glory, but had always gone on to rule out any such possibility. Cicero, for example, had explicitly canvassed the idea in Book II of *Moral Obligation*, only to dismiss it as a manifest absurdity. Anyone, he declares, who "thinks that he can win lasting glory by pretence" is "very much mistaken." The reason is that "true glory strikes deep roots and spreads its branches wide," whereas "all pretences soon fall to the ground like fragile flowers."

Machiavelli responds, as before, by rejecting such earnest sentiments in his most ironic style. He insists in chapter 18 that the practice of hypocrisy is not merely indispensable to princely government, but is capable of being sustained without much difficulty for as long as may be required. Two distinct reasons are offered for this deliberately provocative conclusion. One is that most men are so simple-minded, and above all so prone to self-deception, that they usually take things at face value in a wholly uncritical way. The other is that, when it comes to assessing the behaviour of princes, even the shrewdest observers are largely condemned to judge by appearances. Isolated from the populace, protected by "the majesty of the

Skinner uses extensive quotation from text to make his point, while Machiavelli describes much more context

Julius II
out-foxes
C. Borgia.

Cicero on
glory
= temp.

government," the prince's position is such that "everybody sees what you appear to be" but "few perceive what you are." Thus there is no reason to suppose that your sins will find you out; on the contrary, "a prince who deceives always finds men who let themselves be deceived."

The final issue Machiavelli discusses is what attitude we should take towards the new rules he has sought to inculcate. At first sight he appears to adopt a relatively conventional moral stance. He agrees in chapter 15 that "it would be most praiseworthy" for new princes to exhibit those qualities which are normally considered good, and he equates the abandonment of the princely virtues with the process of learning "to be not good." The same scale of values recurs even in the notorious chapter on "How princes should keep their promises." Machiavelli begins by affirming that everybody realises how praiseworthy it is when a ruler "lives with sincerity and not with trickery," and goes on to insist that a prince ought not merely to seem conventionally virtuous, but ought "actually to be so" as far as possible, "holding to what is right when he can," and only turning away from the virtues when this is dictated by necessity.

However, two very different arguments are introduced in the course of chapter 15, each of which is subsequently developed. First of all, Machiavelli is somewhat quizzical about whether we can properly say that those qualities which are considered good, but are nevertheless ruinous, really deserve the name of virtues. Since they are prone to bring destruction, he prefers to say that they "look like virtues"; and since their opposites are more likely to bring "safety and well-being," he prefers to say that they "look like vices."

where is conclusion ??

DOCUMENTS

#1 The exchange of letters between Machiavelli, exiled after 1512 to his farm at San Casciano in Tuscany, and his friend in Rome, Francesco Vettori, provides the setting for the composition of *The Prince*. In the first selection, Vettori, a Florentine patrician and statesman, describes his rather luxurious life as Florence's envoy to the papal court in Rome, where he hobnobbed with Pope Leo X, cardinals, and other diplomats. In his famous reply of December 10, 1513, the second selection, Machiavelli stresses his poverty and misery, alleviated only by his "conversation with the ancients" in his evening study of classical history. Composed with ironic intent as the mirror image of Vettori's life in Rome, Machiavelli's depiction of his grim exile in the Tuscan countryside is no doubt exaggerated. These two letters nevertheless provide deeply personal and contrasting vi- > ??

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli used the lessons of ancient history and contemporary events to educate a "new prince" to succeed in a volatile, even dangerous, political context. The third selection comprises excerpts from several chapters in *The Prince*. Chapter 7 presents Machiavelli's view of Cesare Borgia. Chapters 15, 17, and 18 address the prince's need to use evil methods for his own preservation. Finally, Chapters 24 through 26 examine how Italian princes have lost their states. Machiavelli then posits that fortune is a woman, controlled better by a bold prince than a cautious one, and he concludes with an exhortation to a "new prince" to free Italy from the barbarians.

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