

Reading 1:**The Florentine: The man who taught rulers how to rule.**By Claudia Roth Pierpoint (*The New Yorker*, September 15, 2008) [Excerpts]

The Prince, Machiavelli's how-to guide for sovereigns, turned out to be "a scandal that Western political thought and practice has been gazing at in horror and in fascination since its first publication," to quote from Albert Russell Ascoli's introduction to Peter Constantine's new translation.

Circulated in manuscript for years, the book was not published until 1532—nearly five years after Machiavelli's death—and received its first significant critique within the decade, from an English cardinal who pronounced the author "an enemy of the human race." Machiavelli stood accused of having inspired Henry VIII to defy papal authority and seize

ecclesiastical power for the crown. Some thirty years later, in France, the book was blamed for inciting Queen Catherine de' Medici to order the massacre of two thousand rebel Protestants. (There seems to have been little besides her family connection to warrant the Machiavellian association.) His notoriety grew, less through knowledge of the offending book than through the many lurid and often skewed attacks it prompted, with titles on the order of "Stratagems of Satan." Wherever a sovereign usurped power from the church or the nobility, whenever ostentatious deceit or murderous force was used, Machiavelli was spied in the shadows, scribbling at his desk amid the olive groves, his quill dipped in a poison so potent that it threatened the power structures of Europe.

What caused the furor? Here, out of context and placed end to end (a method not unfamiliar to his attackers), are some of Machiavelli's most salient and satanic points: "A prince, particularly a new prince, cannot afford to cultivate attributes for which men are considered good. In order to maintain the state, a prince will often be compelled to work against what is merciful, loyal, humane, upright, and scrupulous"; "A wise ruler cannot and should not keep his word when it would be to his disadvantage"; "Men must be either flattered or eliminated, because a man will readily avenge a slight grievance, but not one that is truly severe"; "A man is quicker to forget the death of his father than the loss of his patrimony." And, the distilled spirit of this dark brew: "How one lives and how one ought to live are so far apart that he who spurns what is actually done for what ought to be done will achieve ruin rather than his own preservation."

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"A prince, therefore, must not fear being reproached for cruelty," he concludes, issuing one of the memorably black-hearted maxims that do not mean exactly what they say. (On the question of murdering a few to save a greater number, Thomas More took a similar position in "Utopia," which followed "The Prince" by just three years and, giving its name to the very

notion of political idealism, has stood in moral counterpoint ever since.) For Machiavelli, cruel and unusual measures were to be used only out of necessity, to be ended quickly, and to be converted into benefits (safety, security, wealth) for the prince's subjects. Rulers who perpetrated needless or excessive cruelties—such as King Ferdinand of Spain, who had robbed his country's Christianized Jews and Moors, and then expelled them—are rebuked, no matter what their achievements may have been. "These means can lead to power," Machiavelli confirms, and then departs from his famous counsel of Realpolitik to add, "but not glory."

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Machiavelli is often credited with the phrase "The end justifies the means." Although he never used exactly these words, and the notion appears to date from Greek tragedy, the implied moral relativism is essential to his work. Insofar as "The Prince" was intended as a means to an end, however, it was a failure: there is no evidence that Giuliano de' Medici ever read it, and the Florentine successor to whom Machiavelli eventually dedicated the book, Giuliano's despotic nephew Lorenzo, was said to have preferred the gift of a pair of hounds. In any case, neither prince saw fit to offer the author a job. Within the plan of the book itself, the final chapter envisions an end so important—the unification of the Italian states—that it justifies not only whatever means must be used to attain it but whatever language must be used to describe it. The prose suddenly becomes effusive, lyrical, and determinedly rousing: the verbal equivalent of pennants flying, trumpets sounding. For Machiavelli is no longer justifying or advising but actively urging the prince toward a goal, and it is a goal much larger than personal power. "Italy, after so many years, must welcome its liberator," he declares. "The love with which these lands that have suffered a flood of foreign armies will receive him will be boundless, as will be their thirst for vengeance, iron loyalty, their devotion and tears. All doors will be flung open. What populace would not embrace such a leader?" Judged as a means to this end, too, "The Prince" was a failure: it was three hundred and fifty years before Machiavelli's nationalist hopes prevailed. Still, he understood that many of his ideas, being so radically new, would meet resistance. Living in the age of great explorers—his assistant in the Florentine Chancery was Agostino Vespucci, cousin of Amerigo—Machiavelli saw himself as one of their company, with a mission "no less dangerous" than seeking "unknown seas and continents."

To the culture at large, the danger was real. "The Prince" offered the first major secular shock to the Christianized state in which we still live. Long before Darwin, Machiavelli showed us a credible world without Heaven or Hell, a world of "is" rather than "should be," in which men were coolly viewed as related to beasts and earthly government was the only hope of bettering our natural plight. Although his ideas have drawn sporadic support throughout history—among seventeenth-century English anti-monarchists, among nineteenth-century German nationalists—it was not until the present age that scholars began to separate the man from his cursed reputation. Roberto Ridolfi's landmark biography, of 1954, made a passionate case for its subject's Italian warmth of spirit. Leo Strauss, a few years later, claimed that Machiavelli intended his most outrageous statements merely to startle and amuse. And, in full redemption, Sebastian de Grazia's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Machiavelli in Hell," of 1989, argued for the quondam devil's stature as a

profoundly Christian thinker. There is today an entire school of political philosophers who see Machiavelli as an intellectual freedom fighter, a transmitter of models of liberty from the ancient to the modern world. Yet what is most astonishing about our age is not the experts' desire to correct our view of a maligned historical figure but what we have made of that figure in his most titillatingly debased form. *The Mafia Manager: A Guide to the Corporate Machiavelli*; *The Princessa: Machiavelli for Women*; and the deliciously titled *What Would Machiavelli Do? The Ends Justify the Meanness* represent just a fraction of a contemporary, best-selling literary genre. Machiavelli may not have been, in fact, a Machiavellian. But in American business and social circles he has come to stand for the principle that winning—no matter how—is all. And for this alone, for the first time in history, he is a cultural hero.

Reading 2:

Medieval Sourcebook:

[Niccolo Machiavelli: The Prince \[excerpts\]](#), 1513 (Fordham University)

[brief selections]

