

The prince by niccolo machiavelli



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Niccolo Machiavelli's gift to Lorenzo de Medici, *The Prince*, is a discourse discussing politics and how a prince should rule his state. Machiavelli describes his beliefs on the most efficient way for a prince to rule and remain in power and validates his arguments by referencing historical examples and using metaphors. One of the most prominent themes of *The Prince* is fortune. When speaking of fortune, Machiavelli is referring to luck, fate, or chance. He applies this concept to princes and principalities. Fortune can be either useful or advantageous, or it can be harmful or dangerous. Machiavelli believes that fortune controls half of one's life and the other half is controlled by one's own talent.

Machiavelli argues that someone can gain power through his own ability or by good fortune. Good fortune could possibly come in the form of being born into power, buying power, or being assigned a governmental position. Machiavelli believes that it is very easy to come into power with fortune but very difficult to come into power with one's own ability. On the other hand, staying in power after acquiring it by fortune is very difficult whereas staying in power after acquiring it by virtue is rather simple. Machiavelli supposes this because people who have come into power with fortune “rest simply on the will and fortune of whoever has given a state to them, which are two very inconstant and unstable things. They do not know how to hold and they cannot hold that rank: they do not know how” (26). In other words, Machiavelli believes that individuals who acquire their power through fortune are unable to successfully hold their power because they do not have the necessary experience or foundation to effectively lead a state.

Machiavelli compares fortune to a powerful and flooding river that inflicts destruction of plants, houses, and valuable resources. Although there is nothing that can be done to stop a raging river already in progress, preventable measures can be taken to ensure that such a river inflicts little to no harm by building dams and barriers. Similarly, fortune “ demonstrates her power where virtue has not been put in order to resist her and therefore turns her impetus where she knows that dams and dykes have not been made to contain her” (98). In the same way that one can prevent a catastrophic river by building dams, a prince should strive to anticipate bad fortune so as to be capable of resisting it when it arrives.

Since fortune controls half of one’s life and the other half is controlled by one’s own skill and ability, Machiavelli believes that, as mentioned before, a successful prince is capable of using his own ability to counteract bad fortune. He analyzes what a prince should do during times of peace so as to be prepared for times of war. His views on this concept are rather simple; “ a prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline” (58). Machiavelli expounds his argument by saying that a prince can prepare for war by exercising his mind and his actions. In order to train the mind, a prince should study past battles, wars, and leaders. Furthermore, in order to exercise his deeds, a prince should go on hunting trips so as to further understand his state’s land and keep his armies strong.

According to Machiavelli, a prince cannot rely too much on fortune and must be able to accomplish tasks through his own prowess. He admits that relying on talent and strength is much more difficult than relying on fortune.

Nevertheless, depending on fortune too much can be disastrous because fortune is unpredictable. If a prince who is accustomed to good fortune were to encounter sudden bad fortune, he would be unprepared, thus making the prince susceptible to devastation.

Although a prince may resist fortune and instead rely on his own talents, this may still not be sufficient to attain Machiavelli's perception of an ideal ruling system. Despite his scholarly and defensible politics, Machiavelli did become rather notorious for this concept because it excludes a heightened sense of morality. Machiavelli argues that a prince or ruler should “ not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity” (70). In other words, Machiavelli believes that a prince must know how to adapt to certain circumstances even to the point of being immoral if it is in the best interest of his principality.

Machiavelli states that “ there are two kinds of combat: one with laws, the other with force” (69). He goes on to say that humans are inclined to follow the one with laws whereas animals are inclined to follow the one with force. According to Machiavelli, laws are not adequate enough for a prince effectively lead and therefore, the prince must learn to use force. Because animals are more inclined towards force, Machiavelli asserts that a truly effective ruler will become like animals. He draws attention to the fox and the lion. A fox is unable to protect itself from wolves and the lion is unable to protect itself from traps whereas a fox can detect traps and a lion can fight off wolves. Thus leading to Machiavelli's conclusion; if a prince became like a lion and a fox then he would truly be a great ruler.

The harsh realities that Machiavelli presents are contrary to what most people regard as virtuous or honorable. However, he believes that a truly virtuous prince is one who is willing to compromise his morals and do everything that is deemed necessary for the welfare of his state.

Although beneficial for the principality, this may prove to be a problem for the prince because the inhabitants of his principality may not be satisfied if they learn of any immoralities or dishonesties the prince may have committed. This discontent may compel the public to dislike the prince.

Therefore, Machiavelli cautions princes and rulers to always appear to be virtuous to the public. He even gives an example to prove that he is indeed correct in his assertion. He states that “ Alexander VI never did anything, nor ever thought of anything, but how to deceive men, and he always found a subject to whom he could do it” (70).

Furthermore, Machiavelli explains how the public should perceive a prince regarding certain traits. One particular quality that Machiavelli mentions is generosity. Machiavelli explains that generosity is obviously perceived as virtuous but a prince must remain careful so as not to gain a reputation of generosity. He argues that if a prince gains a reputation of generosity then he will be compelled to use his resources in order to keep that reputation. If, however, he were to try to liberate himself from a generous reputation, he would be perceived as parsimonious, thus causing hatred from the public and likely weakening him or even leading to his downfall.

Another major topic that Machiavelli discusses regards whether it is better for a leader to be feared or loved. Machiavelli explains “ that since men love

at their own convenience and fear at the convenience of the prince, a wise prince should found himself on what is his, not on what is someone else's" (68). Machiavelli supports his contention by analyzing human nature.

According to Machiavelli, people will always fear punishment regardless of the circumstances. On the other hand, if a prince is loved rather than hated, people will be more willing to disregard a connection of love for their personal benefit. However, as mentioned before, Machiavelli believes that a prince cannot be hated by the public. Therefore, a prince must ensure that he is feared but not hated.

In summary, Machiavelli believes that one's ability controls half of his life and the other half is controlled by fortune. In order to be an effective leader, a prince must not become too reliant on good fortune and must overcome any obstacles that arise by using his own talents. Additionally, the prince must use his abilities to anticipate bad fortune so as to be prepared to combat it when it arrives. Furthermore, a prince must truly love and be virtuous to his country. He must love his country enough so as to be willing to employ certain vices such as cruelty, frugality, and deception. He must be feared and respected by the public but he must ensure that he is not hated. Machiavelli believes that if a prince or a ruler were to follow all of his recommendations and admonitions then that prince would surely be able to attain magnificence and be able to preserve his principality.