

The prince: a guide to ruling a kingdom

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“ Good Arms”

Throughout his life, Niccolò Machiavelli writes a collection of works and within those works he creates a well-known book known as *The Prince*. This novel sheds light on modern philosophy and gives an in-depth analysis on how to acquire and maintain political power. Most importantly, this book was an effort to provide a guide for political action based on what's happened in history and Machiavelli's own experiences. One theme Machiavelli introduced in *The Prince* is the role of laws & armies. He touches on how a Prince must lay a strong foundation for both to create a strong state. There cannot be good laws without good arms, therefore focusing on arms is paramount for a ruler. Arms come in the representation of a prince's troops and if a prince desires to rule on the battlefield, he must acquire his own troops. Mercenaries and auxiliaries are not trustworthy and damage will occur from the inside-out if a ruler gives these certain types of soldiers a chance within their army. Looking closely at *The Prince*, it is clear the influence a ruler can have if they possess “ good arms” is based on the idea that a prince should fortify his cities and attack his enemies with his own troops. Dealing with the unreliable natures of mercenaries and auxiliaries would be counter-productive to laying a strong foundation for an army. So if a ruler wants to uphold political power, they must listen to these statements presented in *The Prince*.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli has concern for rulers using mercenary and auxiliary forces because they never give a ruler certainty in what role they will play in their army. Mercenaries are simply sell-swords or better known as

soldiers for hire. They are motivated by monetary gains while offering their services to the highest bidder. Their loyalty is based off money and they can easily focus on their own prestige instead of fighting for the cause they were paid for. Machiavelli describes the nature of basing their state off of mercenaries by saying, “ Mercenaries are auxiliary forces that are useless and dangerous, and anyone whose state is based on mercenary arms will never be established or safe, for mercenaries are disunited, ambitious, lacking in discipline and untrustworthy” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 77). This means that rulers who can’t secure their own troops will certainly be more at risk to watch their lands crumble when left in the hands of mercenaries. Mercenaries are troublesome, and simply cannot be trusted in dire times. Most will stick by their buyer’s side until war ensues and if war does actually happen, they will cower away from the fight. Machiavelli reinforces this point of mercenaries being cowards by saying, “ They are well disposed to be your soldiers so long as you do not declare war, but with the coming of battle they either take flight or desert” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 78). This statement is true and important because of the nature of fighting in wars during this time period. A payment is not enough for a mercenary to risk their life for their employer. Also, the Prince may never know what kind of soldier he is getting when he hires a mercenary. A mercenary can be very skilled on the battlefield or very incompetent but both will affect a ruler’s army. The skilled mercenary can easily become selfish and increase their power at the prince’s expense, while the unskilled one would simply not be reliable in battle. Altogether, with the introduction of mercenary forces, rulers must know that

if they join forces with a talented mercenary, they will never be safe due to the fact that mercenaries cannot be trusted or relied on.

Within chapter XIII of the novel, Machiavelli quickly criticizes the use of auxiliary forces just as he did with mercenary forces. They are simply borrowed troops from a more powerful state which creates a greater threat to the Prince and his rule. A ruler would be in a lose-lose situation if he possessed auxiliary forces. This predicament is explained by Machiavelli when he states, " However, they are almost always harmful to those who have recourse to them, as if they lose, you are undone; if they win, you become their prisoner" (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 82). This gives an image that if the auxiliaries are unsuccessful, the ruler is left defenseless. If the auxiliaries are successful which is a likely outcome, then the prince owes his victory to someone else's power. This makes a ruler indebted to a more powerful ruler, which eventually would lead to internal ruin. A prince could never be comfortable if his success was at the hands of auxiliary forces. Machiavelli makes this point clear by saying, " I conclude, therefore, that no principality is secure without its own army. Indeed, it is wholly dependent upon fortune, having no strength that can be relied upon to defend it in times of adversity" (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 85). He is saying that, there will be no trust in an army if it's dependent on foreign troops. Along with the loss of trust, the prince's reputation would falter due to the use of outside armies. Enemies would know that certain prince is weak and his success is not based off his own strength. This would expose a weakness and would make nearby enemies want to continue to attack the prince because they know he is not as strong as his reputation may be. This would altogether lead to the demise

of a prince because his principality would be based merely off of fortune and uncertainty.

A wise prince creates strong laws and accompanies those strong laws with a strong military presence. Prince's must be self-sufficient in their ways and not show any forms of weakness because weakness will lead to their downfall. It is better for a prince to lose with his own troops and rely on his virtù as a ruler because fortuna can bring about unexpected results.

Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli brings up examples of rulers that prospered and rulers that failed. He mentions Charles VII as a ruler who prospered and states that, " Charles VII, father of King Louis XI, recognized the necessity of arming himself with his own forces when he freed France from the English through a combination of good fortune and personal ability [virtù]" (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 84). This shows that Machiavelli is right when he mentions that rulers have to realize how much better off they are with their own reliable forces. If the people know that their ruler is someone who prides themselves on maintaining and developing their kingdom, they can have full confidence in him. The Kingdom of France was no longer in need of the English forces. Once they were freed, it could be inferred that a weight was lifted off the Kingdom's shoulders. Along with that, reputation is very important in sustaining someone's seat on the throne, therefore, if someone's reputation is tarnished they must find ways to repair their reputation or they risk giving off the perception that they are weak. Cesare Borgia had to learn through experience that the only way to grow in strength on the battlefield is to be in command of his own forces because everything else is threatening and unsafe. Machiavelli speaks on his adapting ways by

saying, " Each time he grew in strength, and at no stage was he more highly rated than when everybody saw that he was in complete command of his own forces" (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 84). This speaks on Borgia's transition from using French auxiliary arms, to various mercenaries that proved dangerous and then his own troops which increased his reputation. This is important because had Borgia not deemed these forces unreliable and untrustworthy, he would have led his Kingdom into certain peril and his legacy would thus be tarnished. Based off Machiavelli's examples, the immense impact that rulers can have by commanding their own troops lifts the morale of their people and lets their troops know that they have trust in an ideal military with no outsiders.

One of Machiavelli's most familiar works, *The Prince*, can be seen as a guide to ruling a Kingdom. In chapters 12 and 13, Machiavelli speaks on the different types of soldiers within an army. Those three groups being mercenaries or soldiers for hire, auxiliaries or borrowed soldiers and lastly, a Prince's own soldiers. The only group that Machiavelli recommends is a Prince's own soldiers, as expected. In dealing with people that aren't their own, princes interact with people that have ulterior motives. Mercenaries are undisciplined and cowardly in the face of the enemy. Their only motivations are money and due to that fact, they have no loyalty's and can turn on any prince. Auxiliaries normally come from allied forces but they are even more dangerous than mercenaries. They possess good fighting skills and can be beneficial in a war effort, but once the war is over, win or lose, the auxiliaries have no ties to that prince. They all are united and under the control of formidable leaders so once again, they show no loyalty. Altogether this

shows how important a prince's own troops will be to his principality. They are loyal win or lose, and built upon strong foundations which creates a picture of what Machiavelli means by good arms. If a ruler wants to rule for a long time in a stable Kingdom, they must be able to limit their liabilities by surrounding themselves with strong authority amongst their armies.