

The prince as a manual for leadership



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The Prince is more of a manual for successful leadership than a book. It was the first book written that did not make any mention of god and at the time was considered controversial for its lack of morals. The Prince describes the two principal types of governments: monarchies (dictatorships) and republics. Machiavelli's focus in The Prince is on monarchies. In his book Machiavelli describes in a very mechanical (orderly) fashion how one can come to power and hang on to their power, he lays out what one must do to hold onto their power. Machiavelli describes some qualities that will lead to a prince's downfall. He also describes other qualities that will allow him to succeed. The interesting part of this is that the qualities we find most moral in people are the ones that will lead to a prince's downfall in the eyes of Machiavelli. As he says, once in power a prince must do everything in his power to retain that power. Machiavelli was born in Italy in 1468. Italy at the time of his birth was in a state of political mayhem, Italy was not united as we know it today. Very little is known about his early life, his childhood is believed to be average. He wasn't noticed until the year 1450 when he got selected for a position as secretary and second chancellor to the Florentine republic. He was a realist who believed in ruthless means. His political ideas were different than those of the time. His ideal leader was someone who could unify Italy under one flag, and that is one of the underlying reasons for writing The Prince. Machiavelli's main reason for writing The Prince was to unify Italy. He wanted to encourage Magnificent to unite Italy. During the Renaissance many writers were scholars of history, as was Machiavelli. This leads to his fanatical belief that a unified nation would be all powerful like the Romans were. He hoped that by writing the Prince he would influence Magnificent to unite Italy and drive the barbarian invaders from Italy.

Machiavelli's views are sometimes considered vile, opportunistic (such as back stabbing someone to attain power or to keep it) and calculating. And yes they are but the truth is that they worked then and they will work until the end of time. Machiavelli wrote with a level of uniqueness and bluntness that was unmatched at the time. The Prince lacks any sign of morality because that's the way he thought (of life and politics) he was very calculating and that comes through in his writing. Machiavelli was an author who wanted his words not only to be read but to be put into action. That's why the Prince reads as a manual and is easy to understand its principles can be put into practice immediately. His writing was in stark contrast to that of his peers. For Example the Humanist believed that an ideal prince was an ethical one. Machiavelli believed that was impossible he wanted to portray political leaders as they truly were. Machiavelli is frank with his ideas he clearly states that morality gets in the way of successful leadership. He gives examples of why a ruthless leader is a "better" leader in the sense of efficiency. He gives that analogy that a leader must sometimes act like the decisive lion or sometimes as the elusive fox. He states that a prince can't be inhibited by morality if he hopes to do his job properly (in a Machiavellian sense). But Machiavelli also warns that the Prince although being ruthless must avoid at all cost from being hated. There is a fine line to walk according to Machiavelli when making decisions. He gives the quote in chapter 19 of "people more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their inheritance." Machiavelli states ways of not being overthrown such as, not taking a man's property. He spends time focusing on this because any thug can attain power through ruthless slaughter of everyone, but won't be able to maintain his power in the long run. But Machiavelli's ideal prince is ruthless

and will slaughter people when necessary but he's / she's more than a thug, they're cunning and manipulative and in it for the long run. Machiavelli knew that his writing of the Prince would influence, and enlighten future princes. He wrote the Prince to stand the test of time. But Machiavelli doesn't take credit for thinking up the ideas, he's merely wrote down what past leaders had done that worked and didn't work and combined them into a manual. I enjoyed reading the Prince; it's an original piece of work with uniqueness to it. What Machiavelli did was analyze past rulers and present rulers of his time period and created a manual for leadership based on that. He basically did something similar to genetic engineering and created what he thought to be the supreme ruler free of morality. In his definition of a successful prince we can see figments of, Caesar, Alexander the Great, Kahn, God and Satan. I personally like Machiavelli's philosophy on free will but it's flawed. He has a soft determinist view or a "have your cake and eat it" type view on free will. He states that half is controlled fortune (by god / kismet) and half is a free action. If we look at this philosophy a little closer we can find the flaw. In theory if one knows everything about something then its predictable, also God would know the end result (hard determinism). However if we have free will then that means that we are unpredictable because God would not know the end result and neither would we nor science (spontanism). Machiavelli's philosophy is pretty interesting it's a lot like his writing in the sense that it tries to do what a prince would do appease both sides without appearing weak on the surface. When I look at the world today I can see some Machiavelli's principles everywhere. When I think of a ruler that suits the complex of "Machiavellian" I picture Kim Jong II. Kim Jong rules with an iron fist never appearing weak, he's cold and calculating. He uses his arsenal of

weapons to persuade others into what he wants. He also follows one of Machiavelli's principles almost exactly. Machiavelli states that a ruler must appear stingy and only show generosity to his troops. Jong does this perfectly he lets his people starve, while always feeding his army. He also knows when to use force or diplomacy. Some people consider Jong to be insane, but for some reason his people don't overthrow him. He does everything right to maintain his power he keeps his people in check by ruling with fear rather than trust, he limits their access to information, thus they don't have a point of reference to call him a bad or a good leader.

Sometimes I use Machiavellian type tactics to a lesser degree in a covert way you could say. Very few people know the true Chuck. If it's to my benefit I will portray myself in a manner that is agreeable to that particular person. I like to manipulate people to my advantage but in covert way that they are almost unaware to it, usually getting them to do something that I would have to do, and then taking credit for their work. Yes this may be wrong but hey it works in this world. And at this point in my life I don't care how many people and bridges I burn on my way to success, but I really have never had someone tell me they hate me. I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone. Anyone who reads The Prince shouldn't recommend it if they are reading it to become a prince / leadership position. Because, if one wants to be a leader they must do everything in their power to keep others from trying to challenge their leadership. However this is a well written book, the version I had a map of Italy and brief biography of Machiavelli and a great introduction it also came with translation notes. I choose the unabridged version with no footnotes just a straight translation (because it was cheaper) I wanted to think of my own ideas not paraphrase someone's footnotes. The reading

level of the book depends on which version one chooses, the version I had would probably be something of a high school level / college level. Works

CitedMachiavelli Niccolo; The Prince; Penguin Classics 2003