***Text to Text | ‘The Prince’ and ‘Why Machiavelli Still Matters’***

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*Background: Machiavelli is typically maligned as being the author of a playbook for autocrats and tyrants who use evil means to hold onto power. He is often remembered as the political philosopher who counseled that it was better to be feared than loved and that ends justify means — in fact, these notions are the basis for the less-than-flattering term “Machiavellian.” But Machiavelli’s how-to manual is more complex than these oversimplifications can capture.

Machiavelli does not embrace meanness and violence for their own sake; he uses examples from history to make his case that sometimes these devices are necessary for the good of the republic. Machiavelli counsels that a ruler must act on “the real truth of the matter” rather than “the imagination of it,” because in reality people do not always do what is right and virtuous. He argues that “a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil.” Machiavelli’s views can be seen as cynical, callous and tyrannical. Or they can be judged to be pragmatic and sound advice for an effective democratic and just leader.*

*John T. Scott and Robert Zaretsky argue that contemporary Americans, perhaps more than anyone else, could learn a lesson or two from Machiavelli. “Like the political moralizers Machiavelli aims to subvert, we still believe a leader should be virtuous: generous and merciful, honest and faithful,” they write. “Yet Machiavelli teaches that in a world where so many are not good, you must learn to be able to not be good.”*

*Below, we selected passages from four chapters in Machiavelli’s “The Prince” that relate most to Mr. Scott’s and Mr. Zaretsky’s Opinion piece. You can find the entire book online at*[*Project Gutenberg*](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1232/1232-h/1232-h.htm#link2H_4_0005)*. In Excerpt 2, we republish the second half of “Why Machiavelli Still Matters.” Read both, and then decide for yourself what Machiavelli is really saying, and why you think “The Prince” is relevant today.*

**Excerpts from Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince*:**

**Concerning Things for Which Men, and Especially Princes, Are Praised or Blamed**
It remains now to see what ought to be the rules of conduct for a prince towards subject and friends. And as I know that many have written on this point, I expect I shall be considered presumptuous in mentioning it again, especially as in discussing it I shall depart from the methods of other people. But, it being my intention to write a thing which shall be useful to him who apprehends it, it appears to me more appropriate to follow up the real truth of the matter than the imagination of it; for many have pictured republics and principalities which in fact have never been known or seen, because how one lives is so far distant from how one ought to live, that he who neglects what is done for what ought to be done, sooner effects his ruin than his preservation; for a man who wishes to act entirely up to his professions of virtue soon meets with what destroys him among so much that is evil.

Hence it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity. Therefore, putting on one side imaginary things concerning a prince, and discussing those which are real, I say that all men when they are spoken of, and chiefly princes for being more highly placed, are remarkable for some of those qualities which bring them either blame or praise; and thus it is that one is reputed liberal, another miserly, using a Tuscan term (because an avaricious person in our language is still he who desires to possess by robbery, whilst we call one miserly who deprives himself too much of the use of his own); one is reputed generous, one rapacious; one cruel, one compassionate; one faithless, another faithful; one effeminate and cowardly, another bold and brave; one affable, another haughty; one lascivious, another chaste; one sincere, another cunning; one hard, another easy; one grave, another frivolous; one religious, another unbelieving, and the like. And I know that every one will confess that it would be most praiseworthy in a prince to exhibit all the above qualities that are considered good; but because they can neither be entirely possessed nor observed, for human conditions do not permit it, it is necessary for him to be sufficiently prudent that he may know how to avoid the reproach of those vices which would lose him his state; and also to keep himself, if it be possible, from those which would not lose him it; but this not being possible, he may with less hesitation abandon himself to them. And again, he need not make himself uneasy at incurring a reproach for those vices without which the state can only be saved with difficulty, for if everything is considered carefully, it will be found that something which looks like virtue, if followed, would be his ruin; whilst something else, which looks like vice, yet followed brings him security and prosperity….

***Write a brief response to each question. Then highlight the text that supports your response and write the question number in the margin next to each highlighted section.***

1. How does Machiavelli differentiate himself from other writers on this topic from the very beginning?
2. What does Machiavelli suggest is the difference between what *is* done and what *“ought”* to be done? Why is it important to know this difference?
3. What is the effect of Machiavelli’s extended use of parallel structure in the second paragraph?
4. According to Machiavelli, why is it better for a ruler to “do wrong” than to stick to principles of right?
5. What are YOUR thoughts on Machiavelli’s theories in this section?

**Concerning Liberality and Meanness**
Commencing then with the first of the above-named characteristics, I say that it would be well to be reputed liberal. Nevertheless, liberality exercised in a way that does not bring you the reputation for it, injures you; for if one exercises it honestly and as it should be exercised, it may not become known, and you will not avoid the reproach of its opposite. Therefore, any one wishing to maintain among men the name of liberal is obliged to avoid no attribute of magnificence; so that a prince thus inclined will consume in such acts all his property, and will be compelled in the end, if he wish to maintain the name of liberal, to unduly weigh down his people, and tax them, and do everything he can to get money. This will soon make him odious to his subjects, and becoming poor he will be little valued by any one; thus, with his liberality, having offended many and rewarded few, he is affected by the very first trouble and imperilled by whatever may be the first danger; recognizing this himself, and wishing to draw back from it, he runs at once into the reproach of being miserly.

Therefore, a prince, not being able to exercise this virtue of liberality in such a way that it is recognized, except to his cost, if he is wise he ought not to fear the reputation of being mean, for in time he will come to be more considered than if liberal, seeing that with his economy his revenues are enough, that he can defend himself against all attacks, and is able to engage in enterprises without burdening his people; thus it comes to pass that he exercises liberality towards all from whom he does not take, who are numberless, and meanness towards those to whom he does not give, who are few….

***Write a brief response to each question. Then highlight the text that supports your response and write the question number in the margin next to each highlighted section.***

1. What must a ruler make sure of if he is going to practice liberality (generosity)?
2. What is the danger of too much liberality (generosity) on the part of a ruler?
3. What, then, is Machiavelli’s solution to the question of liberality (generosity) v. meanness (stinginess)?
4. What are YOUR thoughts on Machiavelli’s theories in this section?

**Concerning Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether It Is Better To Be Loved Than Feared**
Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women….

***Write a brief response to each question. Then highlight the text that supports your response and write the question number in the margin next to each highlighted section.***

1. If only one is possible, is it better to be loved than feared, according to Machiavelli?
2. What observations on human nature does Machiavelli offer to support his conclusion?
3. Regardless of love or fear, what is one thing Machiavelli does warn rulers to avoid?
4. What are YOUR thoughts on Machiavelli’s theories in this section?

**Concerning the Way in Which Princes Should Keep Faith**
Every one admits how praiseworthy it is in a prince to keep faith, and to live with integrity and not with craft. Nevertheless our experience has been that those princes who have done great things have held good faith of little account, and have known how to circumvent the intellect of men by craft, and in the end have overcome those who have relied on their word. You must know there are two ways of contesting,(\*) the one by the law, the other by force; the first method is proper to men, the second to beasts; but because the first is frequently not sufficient, it is necessary to have recourse to the second. Therefore it is necessary for a prince to understand how to avail himself of the beast and the man. This has been figuratively taught to princes by ancient writers, who describe how Achilles and many other princes of old were given to the Centaur Chiron to nurse, who brought them up in his discipline; which means solely that, as they had for a teacher one who was half beast and half man, so it is necessary for a prince to know how to make use of both natures, and that one without the other is not durable. A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not understand what they are about. Therefore a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may be turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men were entirely good this precept would not hold, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them. Nor will there ever be wanting to a prince legitimate reasons to excuse this non-observance. Of this endless modern examples could be given, showing how many treaties and engagements have been made void and of no effect through the faithlessness of princes; and he who has known best how to employ the fox has succeeded best.

But it is necessary to know well how to disguise this characteristic, and to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are so simple, and so subject to present necessities, that he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived. One recent example I cannot pass over in silence. Alexander the Sixth did nothing else but deceive men, nor ever thought of doing otherwise, and he always found victims; for there never was a man who had greater power in asserting, or who with greater oaths would affirm a thing, yet would observe it less; nevertheless his deceits always succeeded according to his wishes, because he well understood this side of mankind.

Therefore it is unnecessary for a prince to have all the good qualities I have enumerated, but it is very necessary to appear to have them. And I shall dare to say this also, that to have them and always to observe them is injurious, and that to appear to have them is useful; to appear merciful, faithful, humane, religious, upright, and to be so, but with a mind so framed that should you require not to be so, you may be able and know how to change to the opposite.

And you have to understand this, that a prince, especially a new one, cannot observe all those things for which men are esteemed, being often forced, in order to maintain the state, to act contrary to fidelity, friendship, humanity, and religion. Therefore it is necessary for him to have a mind ready to turn itself

***Write a brief response to each question. Then highlight the text that supports your response and write the question number in the margin next to each highlighted section.***

1. According to Machiavelli, which rulers tend to be more successful: those who are honest (keep faith) or those who are crafty?
2. According to Machiavelli, which is more effective: to win by law (like a man) or to win by force (like a beast)?
3. How does the mythological allusion support Machiavelli’s conclusion (from #15)?
4. What is the purpose of the fox and lion metaphors?
5. What observation about human nature does Machiavelli make to support his stance on faith v. craft?
6. What proof does history offer of the faithlessness of princes?
7. Why was Alexander VI so successful in deceiving, according to Machiavelli?
8. If it is a given that a prince must be dishonest, what must he know how to do as well? Why is this important?
9. What are YOUR thoughts on Machiavelli’s theories in this section?

**CONCLUSION**

1. **What is the main idea of Machiavelli’s *The Prince*?**
2. **What is his tone throughout the excerpts?**
3. **What is the purpose of his writing?**
4. **How do Machiavelli’s theories connect to our understanding of the characters in *Julius Caesar*?**