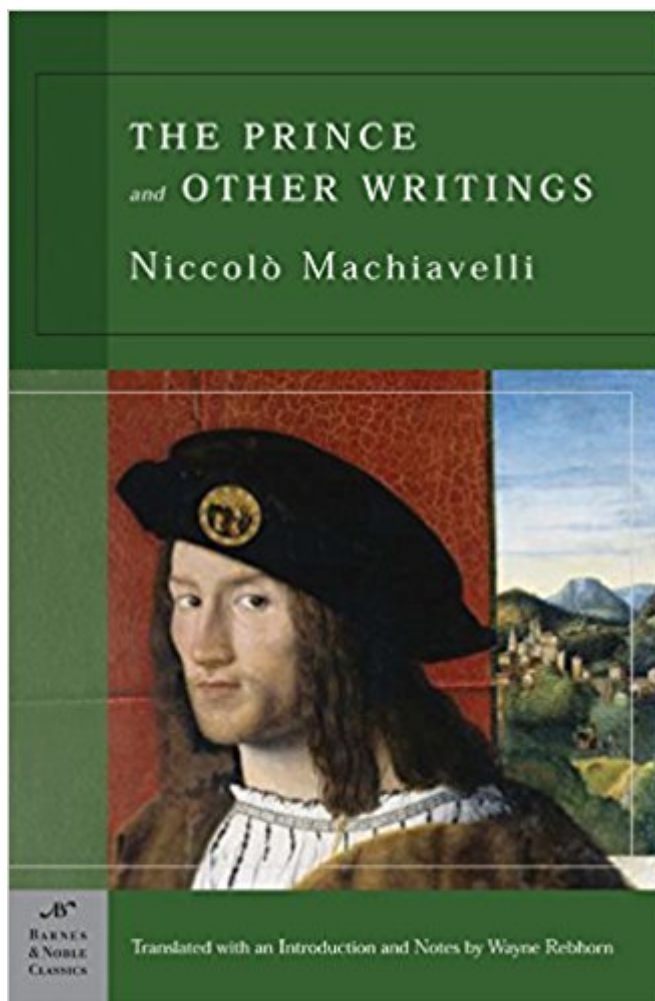


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The Prince And Other Writings (Barnes & Noble Classics)



Synopsis

The Prince and Other Writings, by Niccolò Machiavelli, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics® series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics: New introductions commissioned from today's top writers and scholars; Biographies of the authors; Chronologies of contemporary historical, biographical, and cultural events; Footnotes and endnotes; Selective discussions of imitations, parodies, poems, books, plays, paintings, operas, statuary, and films inspired by the work; Comments by other famous authors; Study questions to challenge the reader's viewpoints and expectations; Bibliographies for further reading; Indices & Glossaries, when appropriate. All editions are beautifully designed and are printed to superior specifications; some include illustrations of historical interest. Barnes & Noble Classics pulls together a constellation of influences—biographical, historical, and literary—to enrich each reader's understanding of these enduring works.

One of history's greatest political philosophers, Niccolò Machiavelli is notorious for his treatise *The Prince*, which has become a cornerstone of modern political theory. Written in 1513 and published in 1532, after Machiavelli's death, *The Prince* immediately provoked controversy that has continued unabated to this day. Defining human nature as inherently selfish, Machiavelli proposes that social conflict and violence are natural phenomena that help determine the ablest, most versatile form of government. Asserting that idealism has no place in the political arena, *The Prince* primarily addresses a monarch's difficulties in retaining authority. Considered the first expression of political realism, it has often been accused of advocating a political philosophy in which "the end justifies the means." Indeed the emphasis in *The Prince* on practical success, at the expense even of traditional moral values, earned Machiavelli a reputation for ruthlessness, deception, and cruelty. Many scholars contend, however, that the author's pragmatic views of ethics and politics reflected the realities of his time, as exemplified by the Medici family of Florence. Debates about Machiavelli's theories are as lively today as they were 450 years ago, but no one questions the importance of his fundamental contribution to Western political thought. This newly translated edition also includes Machiavelli's Letter to Francesco Vettori, *The Life of Castruccio Castracani*, and excerpts from the *Discourses on Livy*. Wayne A. Rebhorn, Celanese Centennial Professor of English at the University of Texas, has authored numerous studies of Renaissance European literature. His *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men* won the Howard R. Marraro Prize of the Modern Language Association of America in 1990.

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Customer Reviews

From Wayne Rebhorn's Introduction to *The Prince and Other Writings* All of Machiavelli's works, and especially *The Prince*, can be read as a series of responses to the crises he was living through, to the personal crisis he experienced when the Florentine republic fell in 1512, and to the larger crises involving Italian and international politics, the theoretical conception of the state, and the vision of the ruler. Or perhaps it would be better to say that his texts are not just passive responses to those crises, but active attempts to define, to give voice to, what was happening in the world around him, and indeed to promote action in that world as well. In them Machiavelli is asking over and over the same questions: why are we Italians so weak, so much unlike our Roman ancestors? Why have we become the prey of the larger states around us? And how can we remedy this situation? What sort of state and what sort of ruler will allow us not just to maintain our independence, but perhaps to regain some of the glory of ancient Rome? Bound up with these questions was Machiavelli's more personal one: why did I fail, and how can I get back the political role I once played in the republic? As he tries to answer these questions in *The Prince*, the *Discourses*, and his other works, he also grapples with the problem of how to make sense out of history, how to extract useful lessons from it so that we can avoid the mistakes of the past. Although Machiavelli theorizes about politics throughout his works, he takes pains to separate what he is doing from the work of pure theorists. Thus, at the start of chapter 15 in *The Prince*, he distinguishes himself from those who have imagined republics and principalities for

themselves which have never been seen or known to exist in reality. Instead, he tells us, he writes about *la verità effettuale della cosa*, 'the effectual truth of the matter'. By 'effectual truth' he means a truth about politics as well as about human nature that has an effect in the real world, rather than something more purely speculative or contemplative. Although *More's Utopia* might seem to be the sort of work about an imaginary republic that Machiavelli is objecting to here, it was written in 1515 and 1516, some two years or so after Machiavelli started working on *The Prince*. Nevertheless, *More's* thought-experiment about the best of all possible states grows out of a long tradition, which Machiavelli surely knew, of imagining ideal states and rulers, a tradition that stretches back into antiquity and that has Plato's *Republic* as one of its clear progenitors. Moreover, there was a genre of political writing to which both authors are responding in their books, a genre called the *speculum principis*, the 'mirror for princes', in which authors composed idealized portraits of princes and their duties in order to offer instruction to rulers and rulers in training. The great Dutch Humanist Desiderius Erasmus had written just such a volume, the *Institutio principis christiani* (*The Education of a Christian Prince*), for Charles V, and published it in 1516. Like many works in this genre that stretch back well into the Middle Ages, Erasmus's book offers sober advice stressing the importance of Judeo-Christian morality as the basis for governing. While *More's Utopia* fits quite comfortably into this genre in many ways, Machiavelli's *Prince* can almost be read as a parody of its idealistic moralizing, for his book repeatedly underscores the gap between morality and politics, insisting that a prince who tries to do good in a world full of bad people will inevitably come to grief. Machiavelli takes the name of the genre seriously: he tries to reflect in the 'mirror' of his book what real princes really do and must do in the real world if they are to obtain and maintain political power. In keeping with his preference for an effectual truth that bears fruit in the real world, Machiavelli stresses the importance of judging human beings and their deeds in terms of how things turn out in the end. This is not the same thing as saying that the end justifies the means, although sometimes Machiavelli is interpreted that way. Revealingly, in chapter 18 of *The Prince*, 'How Princes Must Keep Their Word', he uses a phrase that shows just how different his thought is on this subject. The phrase occurs just after Machiavelli has declared that a prince must appear to be 'all mercy, all loyalty, all sincerity, all humanity, all religion' although he need not actually have any of these qualities. The reason is that men in general judge things by appearances and that the few who may perceive the truth will be overwhelmed by the many who do not. Moreover, he continues, 'in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is

no court of appeal, one looks at the outcome. One looks at the outcome: si guarda al fine. Machiavelli's statement here may seem to suggest he is saying that the end or outcome justifies whatever means the prince might use to achieve it; in other words, that a good end makes even the most wicked means morally acceptable. But what he is really saying is that people will judge a prince's means to be good as long as he succeeds and the outcome is beneficial to them. Machiavelli admits, both here and in his works generally, that morality may be a good thing, but it is not what drives people's behavior in the real world. What he is not saying, however, is also important, for by not declaring that the end justifies the means for the prince, he is not offering the prince a convenient way out of the moral dilemma he faces, which results from the fact that if he wants to gain and keep political power, he has to do despicable things that cannot really be justified morally by the end he pursues. If one could argue that a prince who does evil does it simply in order to bring about some greater moral good; defined as, say, political stability or economic welfare; then this problem would vanish. Such a move was precisely the one made by political theorists in Machiavelli's wake who came up with the idea of *ragione di stato* or *raison d'état*; namely, that some serious and morally unimpeachable reason of state could justify the most criminally culpable acts. By contrast, what Machiavelli is saying is harder, more uncomfortable, more thought-provoking, and more cynical: sometimes the prince must do evil simply because he cannot gain or preserve power otherwise, but as long as he succeeds and people benefit from it, they will not be upset.

The editor of this edition of *The Prince* presents the information very cleanly and accurately. This book is easy to read and yet enriching at the same time, capturing Machiavelli's intended tone while also ensuring the reader can easily follow. Note: If you're not entirely into political philosophy or military history, I wouldn't entirely recommend it, as Machiavelli focuses on one or two ideas for the most part. Yet I believe anyone can read this and enjoy it.

I have several copies of *The Prince*, (including Kindle) Everyone who is interested in the philosophy of Bill Clinton should read it, since he said he read it constantly. I hope someone gives our present president a copy for Christmas!

A classic

One of the most influential books ever written. Required reading for all to understand past, current,

and future political motivations.

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