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**The Prince by Niccolò Machiavelli (1513)**

Machiavelli’s *The Prince* offers insight into the lives of princes during the 16th century and presents a helpful resource in historical research on the socio-political and military structures in Italy at the time. Additionally, it provides advice for princes on running a successful principality in the current political climate of 1500s Italy. Advising in issues such as politics and military organisation which has influenced the centuries post-Machiavelli, its influence on the same level as Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto[[1]](#footnote-1), with *The Prince* ‘emerging as the supreme creation of Italian history up to this time’[[2]](#footnote-2). The political theory of Machiavellianism can be seen in literary work by Shakespeare with characters such as ‘honest and just’[[3]](#footnote-3) Iago in Othello exhibiting a manipulative personality along with only ‘appealing to [his own] self-interest’[[4]](#footnote-4), and with the mention of the ‘murderous Machiavel’ in Henry VI, Part III.[[5]](#footnote-5) *The Prince* has also influenced historical research on social and political issues such as human nature, since its publication ‘historians of political thought [have used it] to level the change that ancient writers were too idealistic in their assessment of human behaviour’, and this extended impact of Machiavelli’s work reinforces its use as a historical source as it shapes modern thinking by addressing current socio-political structures.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Within *The Prince,* the princes are given ‘ornaments worthy of their high position’, suggesting that the princes, royalty, and these principalities were an integral part of everyday people’s lives and of high standing with gifts such as ‘horses, weapons, cloth of gold, [and] precious stones’ with the use of titles of respect such as ‘Your Magnificence’ throughout the extract.[[7]](#footnote-7) Machiavelli addresses several issues in court and organising a country, such as control over their people and avoiding foreign invasion, alongside some observations in human nature that resemble ancient writers such as Aristotle, sharing the view that ‘human beings have been and always will be fundamentally the same’, which expands social studies and social history with interaction and beliefs about human society, even in the 21st century.[[8]](#footnote-8) Machiavelli’s treatise has developed the study of historical politics and study of human behaviours with ‘reflections of antiquity were based on the caprice of imagination and are ineffectual for real-world guidance.’[[9]](#footnote-9) Reshaping and developing social sciences and morality, influencing literature with Machiavellian characters such as Iago from Shakespeare’s Othello, and television with Lord Varys and Lord Baelish in Game of Thrones, emphasising its prominence within the 17th century through to the 21st century. Machiavellian characters are ’motivated by selfishness, immune to reason and persuasion,’[[10]](#footnote-10) manipulate others and thrive in uncertainty, with Lord Baelish believing that ‘Chaos isn’t a pit. Chaos is a ladder.’[[11]](#footnote-11) This manipulation is presented in *The Prince* within chapter 17, as Machiavelli discusses cruelty and compassion, with the prince not having to worry ‘if he incurs reproach for his cruelty’ advising to focus on keeping subjects ‘united and loyal’, prioritising loyalty over compassion by ‘making an example or two’ preventing uprisings with the focus on being both feared and respected rather than being loved.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Machiavelli advises that the princes ‘read history… [and learn from others] victories or their defeats’, learning from historical figures to develop the prince’s military organisation and techniques, as ‘Alexander the Great imitated Achilles; Ceaser imitated Alexander…’[[13]](#footnote-13) Machiavelli’s examples of leaders of antiquity along with Hannibal, who was ‘feared and respected’[[14]](#footnote-14) with his military success being attributed to his ‘boldness’, willingness to learn, his people skills and military tactics.[[15]](#footnote-15) Creating a strong foundation for the young princes to follow, with the study of vernacular people and tradition Hannibal remained ‘fresh, fluid and innovative in his tactics.’, and exploiting enemy commander’s weaknesses ‘to entice them into a tactical position [to] destroy them.’[[16]](#footnote-16) Machiavelli’s use of these figures extends *The Prince*’s use and importance as an historical document in military and political history, influencing 16th century Italian politics and contemporary research in societal structure and organisation at the time, moving focus away from republics and towards principalities. Christopher Holman theorises that Machiavelli’s use of these examples were ‘to affirm the uniquely human capacity for political creation…[and break] free from the past, for the sake of the affirmation of the human potential to upset the order of things through the institution of the new.’ [[17]](#footnote-17) Reinforcing Machiavelli’s focus on creating a strong prince who prevented uprisings and strengthening the system of principalities bringing in new systems among the Italian Renaissance, using new political and military methods adapted from these leaders mentioned throughout the text.

Machiavelli also emphasises the ‘mastery of Latin’[[18]](#footnote-18), this can be reflective of the heavily Catholic nature of pre-renaissance and Renaissance Italy, that survived the scientific revolution within politics. On the other hand, this mastery of Latin could be Machiavelli steering the princes on a more academic venture in their knowledge to expand their understanding of history. Early 19th century interpretations by philosophers such as Georg Hegel, argue that *The Prince* ‘advocates the struggles of national independence and the building of modern nation-states out of feudal social conditions.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Linking with the revolution-heavy West in the 18th century post-Machiavelli, creating a foundation for these new nation-states within Europe. This treatise also received attention from Marxist-Leninist thought, Antonio Gramsi links the role of the Communist party with that of ‘Machiavelli’s civil prince’ supporting Hegel’s argument with the creation of Communist Russia by Lenin in 1914 as a modern nation-state from the outdated aristocracy of Russia, dictating and aiming to help all people within the country rather than just the bourgeoisie and social elite.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Ultimately, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*’s influence transcends time with its presence prevalent in media and popular culture of the 21st century, along with differing interpretations within Shakespearean plays and links to the Communist Party. *The Prince* is one of few sources on the organisation and thought of Italian principalities, displaying the advice princes received from the government. Machiavelli’s writings have shifted social, political, and military historical research, with links to themes of human nature via Machiavellianism in literature, sociology and influencing political thinkers such as Antonio Gramsi.

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**Why did some people feel the need to reform the established Church?**

The established Catholic Church was critiqued for its strict hierarchal nature, corruption and abuse of power, and exploitation of ordinary people for financial gain in the form of indulgences, with one of its key critics, Martin Luther forming Lutheranism in opposition to this oppressive Church. Since the Break from Rome in 1540 with King Henry VIII Tudor, many Protestant sects of Christianity emerged alongside this new Anglican tradition. As these new ideas all emerged alongside the invention of the printing press in 1440 these new sects ‘were viewed as the product of a single energy, unwitting agents or heralds of modernity, and so, self-evidently superior to the medieval Catholicism they replaced.’[[21]](#footnote-21) The established Church’s Eucharist was Papal focused rather than individualistic, with the vicar at the altar seperated from the communion by a Rood screen and all worship was performed in Latin with Gregorian chanting performed by monks. Martin Luther, among other reformers, criticised the Church’s use of indulgences in order to build new churches by promising lessened time in purgatory and Luther claimed that ‘the dying are freed from all penalties’ and the Pope ‘does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties’.[[22]](#footnote-22) These were the main disputes the reformers had with the Catholic Church, advocating for vernacular Bibles and communion inclusion in all forms of worship.

Henry VIII was proclaimed as the ‘Defender of the faith’ by Pope Leo X in 1521, this title remained after his and the Catholic Church’s disagreement on divorce in 1520.[[23]](#footnote-23) This social disagreement is considered the catalyst of England’s Break from Rome in 1540, forming a ‘contest between Church and Commonwealth… [creating] competition between the Pope and a monarch… in their claim to jurisdiction.’[[24]](#footnote-24) The Act of Supremacy in 1534 supported the reformers’ concerns with the Church’s administrative problems seen during the Great Schism of 1054. With Michael Cerularius in the East vs. Pope Leo IX in the West, this earlier division of the Catholic Church reinforces the Protestant Reformers’ anxieties over the fragility of Papal authority. These administrative changes backed the call for religious reform in the 1500s by Martin Luther, with his ‘angry critique… [rapidly escalated] into a more fundamental challenge to the theological structures’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Luther may have influenced the Archbishop Tillotson of Canterbury, who ‘looked on the whole complex of popery; as such a corruption of the design of Christianity.’[[26]](#footnote-26) These ideas broke down the hierarchy of Church and allowed individuality to emerge from the ancient, Papal focused Catholic Church in England. Henry VIII’s Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536 and the inclusion of vernacular Bibles was appealing to those who wished for reform and the reshaping of the Church’s structure.

Martin Luther critiqued Tetzel’s phrase ‘As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs’[[27]](#footnote-27) in his criticism of the indulgences collected by the Church in promise of less time in purgatory because ‘no divine authority’[[28]](#footnote-28) contains evidence of that or of Purgatory itself. Which are other issues reformists had with the established Church and focused on the Bible as the only/the most important source of divine authority, moving away from popery and clergy as a main source of religious authority as the Bible is direct guidance from God. The established Church’s Sacrament of Penance could be fulfilled by confession, or absolution of sins by a priest, or visiting Holy Relics. This is significant because Luther ‘nailed his 95 Theses against the sale of indulgences to the gates’ of Duke Frederick III the Wise’s Wittenberg Castle Church which held 5,005 alleged relics.[[29]](#footnote-29) With the increased use of the printing press new ideas could spread rapidly with Reformation ‘pamphlets and sermons… designed to be read to the illiterate as well as by the literate’, this inclusion and diversity may have appealed to the people of the time as this information was accessible unlike the exclusivity of the Bible, worship, and connection with God.[[30]](#footnote-30) Along with increase in European Universities ‘from 20 to 70’, exposed students to new traditions and ideas increasing opposition to the established Church, these new ideas were easily published with the printing press since the 1440s allowing ‘Luther’s ideas [to blanket] Europe within months.’[[31]](#footnote-31)

Papal authority overran Medieval worship with Gregorian chanting performed by the monks, and all services in Latin created a distance between God and the congregations. The vicars were the “ear to God” in order for the congregation to connect with God they had to use clergymen to communicate with him, creating a spiritual division. This separation spiritually was also present physically within the established Churches by a Rood screen dividing the altar and vicar, from the rest of the Church attendants. The Eucharist was used to ‘endorse existing community power structures… saturated with communitarian and corporate imagery.’[[32]](#footnote-32) This lacking individuality and lack of connection with God within Christianity became under attack by reformists due to the controlling nature of the Pope and Clergymen over services and societal expectations, with the regular and holiday worship alongside the other seven sacraments. Eucharist in the established Church focused on the transubstantiation and the literal, physical presence of Jesus Christ while some later Protestant sects of Christianity such as Calvinism and Zwinglianism communion had Christ’s spiritually present. Protestant churches adopted two of the seven Catholic sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist, this reform of sacraments created a freedom within everyday life as the established Church controlled both religious and social aspects of society. Another difference between the established Roman Catholic and Protestant Church was the design and embellishment, linking to Luther’s critique of the collecting of indulgences formed a modest Church after King Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries, forming an intimate Church and connection to God without paying for their salvation.

In conclusion, some people wanted to reform from the established Church because of its corrupt power and administration, lack of individuality within worship and no personal relationship with God. Alongside theological and social disagreements on divorce being a catalyst to the Break from Rome by King Henry VIII Tudor in 1540.

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