

## Summary — Chapter XV: Concerning Things for Which Men, and Princes Especially, Are Praised or Censured

Machiavelli turns the discussion from the strength of states and principalities to the correct behavior of the prince. Machiavelli admits that this subject has been treated by others, but he argues that an original set of practical—rather than theoretical—rules is needed. Other philosophers have conceived republics built upon an idealized notion of how men should live rather than how men actually live. But truth strays far from the expectations of imagined ideals. Specifically, men never live every part of their life virtuously. A prince should not concern himself with living virtuously, but rather with acting so as to achieve the most practical benefit.

In general, some personal characteristics will earn men praise, others condemnation. Courage, compassion, faith, craftiness, and generosity number among the qualities that receive praise. Cowardice, cruelty, stubbornness, and miserliness are usually met with condemnation. Ideally, a prince would possess all the qualities deemed “good” by other men. But this expectation is unrealistic. A prince’s first job is to safeguard the state, and harboring “bad” characteristics is sometimes necessary for this end. Such vices are truly evil if they endanger the state, but when vices are employed in the proper interests of the state, a prince must not be influenced by condemnation from other men.

## Overview of the Entire Book

Machiavelli composed *The Prince* as a practical guide for ruling (though some scholars argue that the book was intended as a satire and essentially a guide on how *not* to rule). This goal is evident from the very beginning, the dedication of the book to Lorenzo de’ Medici, the ruler of Florence. *The Prince* is not particularly theoretical or abstract; its prose is simple and its logic straightforward. These traits underscore Machiavelli’s desire to provide practical, easily understandable advice.

The first two chapters describe the book’s scope. *The Prince* is concerned with autocratic regimes, not with republican regimes. The first chapter defines the various types of principalities and princes; in doing so, it constructs an outline for the rest of the book. Chapter III comprehensively describes how to maintain composite principalities—that is, principalities that are newly created or annexed from another power, so that the prince is not familiar to the people he rules. Chapter III also introduces the book’s main concerns—power politics, warcraft, and popular goodwill—in an encapsulated form.

Chapters IV through XIV constitute the heart of the book. Machiavelli offers practical advice on a variety of matters, including the advantages and disadvantages that attend various routes to power, how to acquire and hold new states, how to deal with internal insurrection, how to make alliances, and how to maintain a strong military.

Implicit in these chapters are Machiavelli's views regarding free will, human nature, and ethics, but these ideas do not manifest themselves explicitly as topics of discussion until later.

Chapters XV to XXIII focus on the qualities of the prince himself. Broadly speaking, this discussion is guided by Machiavelli's underlying view that lofty ideals translate into bad government. This premise is especially true with respect to personal virtue. Certain virtues may be admired for their own sake, but for a prince to act in accordance with virtue is often detrimental to the state. Similarly, certain vices may be frowned upon, but vicious actions are sometimes indispensable to the good of the state. Machiavelli combines this line of reasoning with another: the theme that obtaining the goodwill of the populace is the best way to maintain power. Thus, the *appearance* of virtue may be more important than true virtue, which may be seen as a liability.

The final sections of *The Prince* link the book to a specific historical context: Italy's disunity. Machiavelli sets down his account and explanation of the failure of past Italian rulers and concludes with an impassioned plea to the future rulers of the nation. Machiavelli asserts the belief that only Lorenzo de' Medici, to whom the book is dedicated, can restore Italy's honor and pride.