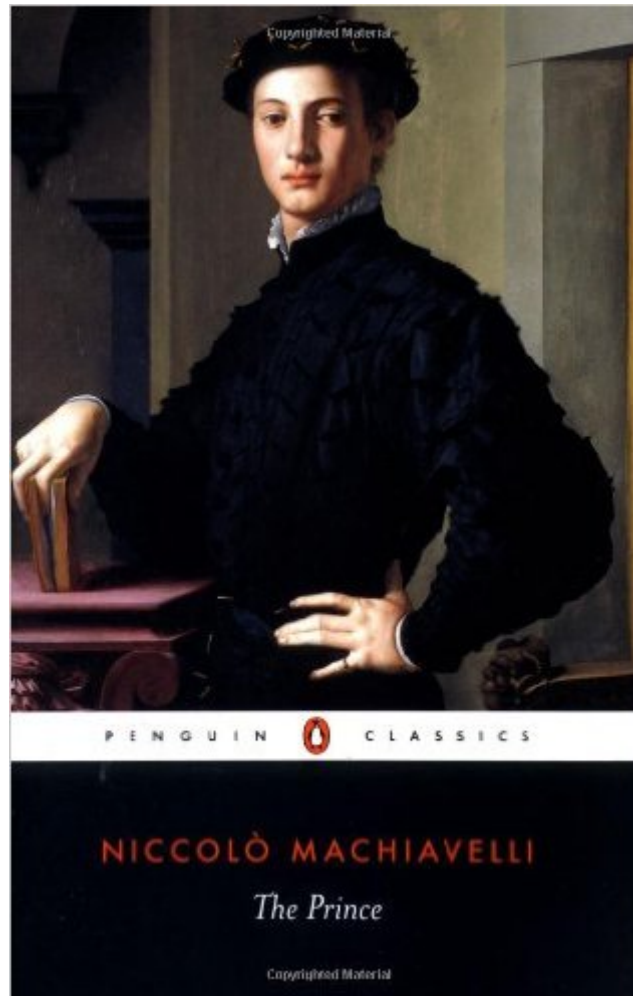


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The Prince (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Machiavelli's highly influential treatise on political power *The Prince* shocked Europe on publication with its advocacy of ruthless tactics for gaining absolute power and its abandonment of conventional morality. Niccolò Machiavelli drew on his own experience of office under the turbulent Florentine republic, rejecting traditional values of political theory and recognizing the complicated, transient nature of political life. Concerned not with lofty ideal but with a regime that would last, *The Prince* has become the bible of realpolitik, and it still retains its power to alarm and to instruct. In this edition, Machiavelli's tough-minded and pragmatic Italian is preserved in George Bull's clear, unambiguous translation. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

The idea of "reviewing" this is more than a little silly -- it's arguably the most influential non-religious work of all time -- but I thought a few comments & historical notes might still be worthwhile. "The Prince" was essentially the first work of political realism in Western thought -- the first work of

Western political philosophy that concerned itself not with the ideal government (as Plato had done in his *Republic*) but with the practical realities of getting and holding power. To describe the impact and influence of that willingness, that first notion that conventional morality might not be the best guide to success, would be as impossible a task as trying to summarize the influence of Galileo. Napoleon is rumored to have written extensive annotations to this book; Stalin allegedly kept a copy on his nightstand. Half of Shakespeare's villains (Iago, Richard III, etc.) derive their character in whole or part from this text. Most of this book is extraordinarily controversial, even today, yet still fundamentally difficult to argue against; there's a reason the Catholic Church kept it on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* for centuries. If you're looking for food for thought, it's here. This particular kindle edition is fairly good; the text is cleanly presented with few typographical or scanning errors, and the translator has clearly made a significant effort to present the text as accurately as possible in a modern translation, with several footnotes detailing possible alternate translations of particular words, etc.

There are two good reasons to read Machiavelli's classic, *The Prince*. First, so you'll know what everyone is referring to when you come across the adjective "Machiavellian" in news stories or other media. This adjective has become so commonplace (and overused) it is almost a cliché. Also, most who use it have never read this letter from Machiavelli, a Renaissance courtier to his Prince (written from prison), but they insist on peppering writings with this noun turned adjective so much that as a matter of clearly understanding what is meant by the term, familiarity with this brief treatise is helpful. Second, this book does describe most (not all) power situations very well. From politics to corporations to most settings where advancement, influence and control exist, Machiavelli's observations and rules apply. You will also discover that Machiavelli was not as evil as he is understood to be in popular thought. What he was doing was describing the rules of the game that have existed and always will exist for many situations involving selfish humans in competition. Machiavelli's rules are neither good nor bad in themselves -- they describe a process. What is good or bad is how those who master Machiavelli's rules use their power and position, in a society that tempers actions according to law and basic Judeo-Christian principals. When those principals do not exist (as in Nazi Germany, the Middle Ages or under Communism, or by those who refuse to live by these constraints), Machiavelli's rules take on their demonic and evil cloak; usually because they serve demonic and evil ends. In societies where positive constraints exist, for example the U.S. political system, Machiavellian behavior can produce excellent results.

This review is of the (currently free) Kindle edition of The Prince. As others have stated at much greater length and with far greater eloquence, this is one of the most important books of political thought and philosophy ever written, and a truly timeless classic. As such, the fact that it's available for free on Kindle makes this a terrific deal, worth every single penny and many more. All the usual conveniences of Kindle applies here: very fast to download via Whispernet, the handiness of being able to annotate and highlight important passages, bookmarking pages you want to reference again later, etc. The slickness of the Kindle format and capabilities plus the inherent worthiness of the book itself easily nets 4 stars. It's been about forever since I last read The Prince, plus I don't really know anything about Italian, so I'm not really fit to talk about the quality of the translation. Suffice it to say that it's a fairly easy book to read and make sense of, but again I can't speak to how true this particular edition is to its source material. Unfortunately, there are a few problems with this edition of The Prince that need to be mentioned, and which in the end detract a little from the overall score. The first and biggest is in the formatting of the book.

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