 The Prince Questions

Book 3

1. ‘… in general you must either pamper people or destroy them; harm them just a little and they’ll hit back; harm them seriously and they won’t be able to. So if you’re going to do people harm make sure you needn’t worry about their reaction’ (p. 10)

‘The desire to conquer more territory really is a very natural and ordinary thing and who ever maintains the resource to do so they’ll always be praised or at least not blamed.’ (p. 13)

What does the above advice suggest about Machiavelli’s views regarding human nature and how does this reflect values of “Realpolitik” inherent in The Prince?

Realpolitik (from the German ‘realpolitik’ – practical politics): a system of politics or principles based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.

Book 5

1. ‘The truth is that the only way to hold such places is to destroy them. If you conquer a city accustomed to self-government and opt not to destroy it, you can expect it to destroy you.’ (p. 19)

How does the high modality language/repetition of the emotive ‘destroy’ and the almost epigrammatic certainty of such statements linked to the second person ‘you’ (remember the text is dedicated to Lorenzo Medici) reinforce Machiavelli’s definition of the term ‘virtu’?

Epigrammatic: in the style of an epigram (a pithy saying or remark expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way); concise, clever, amusing.

Book 6

1. Comment on the analogy of the archer that begins this chapter. What point is Machiavelli making about power and leadership (analogy is a technique used frequently in The Prince).

Analogy: a comparison between one thing and another; typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification

1. . Machiavelli states that both ability and luck or ‘favourable circumstances’ will be required when a new ruler conquers a state but ‘those who haven’t relied too much on lucky circumstances have lasted longer’ (p. 21). The idea of the self-actualised individual as the best leader is stressed, but what else is vital to keeping the fickle public ‘convinced’ of their ruler?

Book 7

1. What point is Machiavelli making regarding Borgia’s treatment of D’Orco? In what ways is this a definitive example of “the end justifies the means” (not an actual quote from The Prince) approach to political power play? What appears to be Machiavelli’s attitude towards the ruthless Borgia?

Political theatre: the power of politics to subdue and control the mases through its appropriation of elements of theatre, ‘the ferocity of the spectacle left people both gratified and shocked’ (p. 29) – an example of ‘spin doctoring’ in the 16th century.

Books 8 – 12

Book 8

1. ‘Cruelty well used (if we can ever speak well of something so bad) is short-lived.’ This aside provides insight into Machiavelli’s views on cruelty and leadership. In your own words, summarise what Machiavelli is saying about the relationship between the two in this chapter.

Book 11

1. Why are Church states in some ways exempt from normal rules of governance?
2. What do Machiavelli’s examples reveal about the role of Popes in this era? How does this differ from the modern perception of the Papacy?

Book 12

1. Machiavelli states: ‘the main foundations of any state whether it be new or old or a new territory are good laws and good armed forces.’ Why are mercenary armies more dangerous and less effective than citizen armies?

Book 14

1. What should be a ruler’s main aim or consideration? Why? How does this emphasise the ‘might makes right’ idea that seems to underpin much of Machiavelli’s world view?

Book 16

1. This is an early attempt at political spin doctoring (controlling and manipulating how a political figure is seen by the public). Machiavelli acknowledges the concept that appearance is often more potent than reality. He explicitly references Caesar’s effective use of generosity as a tool to maintain power. When is generosity practical and when is it not useful to a leader?

Book 17

1. What is the decision Machiavelli representing? Explain his reasoning in this chapter?
2. What does this chapter reveal about Machiavelli’s understanding of power and the relationship between leader and citizen? How is the influence of social context apparent in this section?

Book 18

1. The difference between private life and public perception is a focus of this chapter. What is being stated and how does it emphasise yet again the power of the masses to lead?

‘The crowd is won over by appearances and final results. And the world is all crowd: the dissenting few find no space as long as the majority have any grounds for their opinions.’ (p. 71)

Book 19

1. . What qualities will create public support? What will cause contempt?
2. . From which two threats must a ruler guard? What is his advice regarding conspiracies?

NB. The idea of internal threats is directly applicable to Julius Caesar. Machiavelli does not take into account the complexity and moral idealism of a character such as Brutus when he comments ‘joining a conspiracy is a risky and extremely dangerous business, the man will have to be a rare friend indeed, or a very bitter enemy of the government, if he’s going to keep the faith.’ (p. 73)

1. From what you have read so far, what are some of the fundamental differences between seizing power and holding on to it successfully afterwards?

Book 23

1. What guidance does Machiavelli offer in regard to flatterers and the taking of advice?

NB. One of Caesar’s most notable failures in the play is his habit of listening to those who praise him and ignoring those who want to warn him to the dangerous political reality he inhabits.

1. To what extent do we control our situations, and to what extent are we products of matters we can’t control?