

## *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli

Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) served in the government as a diplomat for fourteen years before becoming a full-time writer and scholar. In 1513, he used his experience in politics and his studies of ancient Roman history to write a book called *The Prince*. In this book, Machiavelli combined his personal experience of politics with his knowledge of the past to offer a guide to rulers on

**H**ow to gain and maintain power.

Here the question arises: is it better to be loved than feared, or vice versa? I don't doubt that every prince would like to be both; but since it is hard to accommodate these qualities, if you have to make a choice, to be feared is much safer than to be loved. For it is a good general rule about men, that they are ungrateful, fickle<sup>1</sup>, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain. While you serve their welfare, they are all yours, offering their blood, their belongings, their lives, and their children's lives, as we noted above—so long as the danger is remote. But when the danger is close at hand, they turn against you. Then, any prince who has relied on their words and has made no other preparations will come to grief, because friendships that are bought at a price, and not with greatness and nobility of soul, may be paid for but they are not acquired, and they cannot be used in time of need. People are less concerned with offending a man who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared: the reason is that love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break any time they think doing so serves their advantage; but fear involves dread of punishment, from which they can never escape.

Still, a prince should make himself feared in such a way that, even if he gets no love, he gets no hate either; because it is perfectly possible to be feared and not hated, and this will be the result if only the prince will keep his hands off the property of his subjects or citizens, and off their women. When he does have to shed blood, he should be sure to have a strong justification and manifest<sup>2</sup> cause; but above all, he should not confiscate<sup>3</sup> people's property, because men are quicker to forget the death of a father than the loss of a patrimony<sup>4</sup>. Besides, pretexts<sup>5</sup> for confiscation are always plentiful; it never fails that a prince who starts living by plunder can find reasons to rob someone else. . . . Returning to the question of being feared or loved, I conclude that since men love at their own inclination but can be made to fear at the inclination of the prince, a shrewd prince will lay his foundations on what is under his own control, not on what is controlled by others.

1. fickle (FIK ul) *adj.* changeable

2. manifest (MAN uh fest) *adj.* clear; plain to see

3. confiscate (KAHN fis kayt) *v.* to seize or take

4. patrimony (PA truh moh nee) *n.* property or inheritance

5. pretexts (PREE teksts) *n.* excuses; false reasons



A portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli painted in the late 1500s

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### Thinking Critically

- Summarize Information** Why does Machiavelli believe that it is better for a prince to be feared than to be loved?
- Make Comparisons** Reread the section of the text titled Castiglione's Ideal Courtier. Is Machiavelli's description of an ideal prince consistent with that of Castiglione's courtier? Why or why not?