

## Discussion Questions for *The Prince*

### Interpretive Questions

1. Do you agree with Machiavelli's statement (p. 201) that "though one may have the strongest of armies, one always needs the backing of the inhabitants to take over the province?"
2. Why does Machiavelli say (p. 205) that in order to successfully occupy a province, one must keep the "weaker powers" in check?
3. What does Machiavelli mean when he writes (p. 206) of the Romans, "Nor did they ever like what is constantly on the lips of our sages today, to enjoy the benefits of the present time, but rather enjoyed the benefits of their ingenuity and prudence; for time brings out everything, and it can bring with it the good as well as the bad and the bad as well as the good."
4. Machiavelli says (p. 207), "The desire to acquire is truly a very natural and common thing; and whenever men who can, do so, they are praised and not condemned; but when they cannot and want to do so just the same, herein lies the mistake and the condemnation." What does he mean by "the mistake and the condemnation"?
5. Is Machiavelli correct when he asserts (p. 209) that "whoever is the cause of another's coming to power ruins himself"?
6. Machiavelli says (p. 209) that "a prudent man should always take the path trodden by great men ... so that, if his own ingenuity does not come up to theirs, at least it will have the smell of it." How will he or his public know that he's treading such a path?
7. Machiavelli says (p. 211) there are princes who are "obliged to beg" and others who are "able to use force." The first "always come to a bad end and never achieve anything," the latter "seldom find themselves in danger." Agree or disagree?
8. Does Machiavelli's recounting of the biography of Agathocles the Sicilian bear out his statement (p. 214) "that in capturing a state the conqueror should consider all the injuries he must inflict, and inflict them all at once, so as not to have to repeat them daily, and in not repeating them to be able to give men a feeling of security and win them over with the benefits he offers."
9. "A prince can never be safe when the common people are his enemy, for there are so many of them; he can be safe with the nobles, for there are so few of them." (p. 216). Does this mean a prince can afford to have some of the nobles be his enemies?
10. Machiavelli states (p.220), "I say that it would be good to be thought of as generous; however, generosity employed in such a way as to give you a reputation for it harms you; yet if it is employed virtuously, and as one should

employ it, it may not be recognized and you will not escape the infamy of its opposite." If this is true, why be generous?

11. On pages 223-224 Machiavelli puts forth the proposition that it is better to be loved than feared, but one must not be hated. What is his logic and do you agree?
12. In the paragraph beginning "A prince must nevertheless make himself feared ..." (p. 224), is Machiavelli saying that it's better to take life or property?
13. In his chapter "How a Prince Should Keep his Word" (p. 225ff) what is Machiavelli's position on a what a prince's regard should be for the truth?
14. What does Machiavelli say (p. 227) that nothing is more essential for a prince than to have a regard for *religion*?
15. In the chapter "How a Prince Should Act to Acquire Esteem (p. 233), " Machiavelli makes statements such as "Nothing makes a prince more esteemed than great enterprises and evidence of his unusual abilities" and "a prince should strive in all his actions to give the impression of the great man of outstanding intelligence." In doing this, does he run the risk of appearing to lack humility?
16. "And the irresolute princes, in order to flee present dangers most often follow the neutral road, and most often they ruin themselves. " (p. 234). Does Machiavelli make a convincing case in this section against maintaining neutrality?
17. "A prince ... should always seek advice, but only when he wishes and not when others wish it ; indeed he should discourage everyone from giving him advice on any subject, unless he asks for it (p. 236)." Does Machiavelli go overboard here in counseling a prince to be so picky about how he receives counsel?

### **Evaluative Questions**

1. Is Machiavelli, as many have maintained, evil?
2. What profit, if any, might our new president gain from Machiavelli's text?