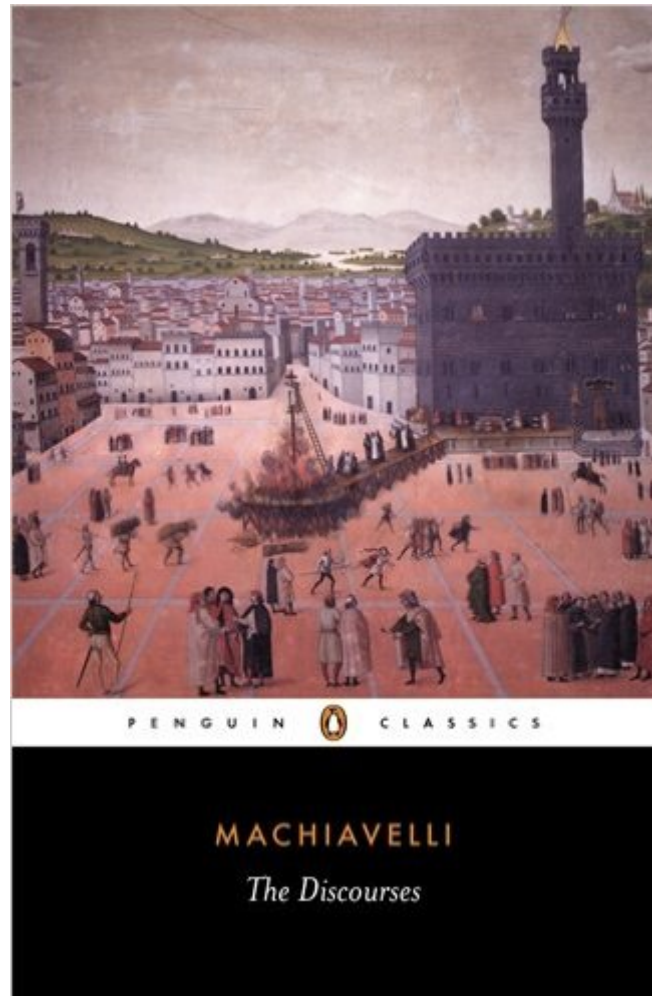


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Discourses



Synopsis

"It is not the well-being of individuals that makes cities great, but the well-being of the community" Few figures in intellectual history have proved as notorious and ambiguous as Niccolò Machiavelli. But while his treatise *The Prince* made his name synonymous with autocratic ruthlessness and cynical manipulation, *The Discourses* (c.1517) shows a radically different outlook on the world of politics. In this carefully argued commentary on Livy's history of republican Rome, Machiavelli proposed a system of government that would uphold civic freedom and security by instilling the virtues of active citizenship, and that would also encourage citizens to put the needs of the state above selfish, personal interests. Ambitious in scope, but also clear-eyed and pragmatic, *The Discourses* creates a modern theory of republic politics. 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 16th century Florentine statesman Niccolò Machiavelli is mostly known for his work "The Prince", arguably the most ill-reputed book ever written, perhaps apart from Hitler's "Mein Kampf". However, "The Prince" seems to have been a purely empirical study of Italian politics, or perhaps

even a rhetorical exercise. In other words, Machiavelli didn't really mean it! At least that's one possible interpretation (yes, the most charitable one). So what were Machiavelli's real positions? Many scholars believe that these are laid out in "The Discourses", a work almost unknown to the general public. Its full title is "Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy". Using the ancient Roman Republic as his model, Machiavelli attempts to analyze the role of fortune and virtue in history, the art of war, and the best system of government. There are certain similarities between "The Discourses" and "The Prince". Both works contain their fair share of pragmatic Realpolitik. On the whole, however, "The Discourses" show Machiavelli in a much better light than "The Prince". Machiavelli actually turns out to be an advocate of a democratic republic! Indeed, since Machiavelli supported the republican side during the political conflicts in Florence, it's safe to assume that *this* is the real Machiavelli. "The Discourses" is not a particularly systematic work. It contains no fully worked-out political theory, and suffers from bad editing. (Machiavelli even admits this in his foreword.) The most interesting part is Book One, which deals with constitutional issues. Book Two, about the expansion of the Romans, is moderately interesting, while Book Three is the most disjointed.

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