

CHAPTER XXV

Throughout *The Prince*, Machiavelli uses fortune (or *fortuna*), in two different ways. One of those ways, portrayed in previous chapters, is like that of luck or of having the favor of powerful people. There he writes of the things a prince can control – his actions – and those he cannot – the favor of others. In this chapter, however, Machiavelli characterizes fortune as the circumstances which the prince cannot control as the latter.

He debates the reasons why one person may succeed where another fails even if they have followed the same steps, or why two completely different approaches can have the same outcome. He proposes that it is a matter of circumstances aligning with the prince's virtues (*virtù*), those qualities desirable for a man. He frames fortune as a series of constantly changing circumstances where certain choices can lead to success or failure.

In the drawing pictured to the left, fortune is portrayed as a woman – as it was a popular characterization in the Renaissance – holding a wheel, which represents her constant state of



change. Her blindfold represents her impartiality to her victim. Furthermore, the borders of the image are made out of waves, a nod to Machiavelli's own metaphor of fortune as an uncontrollable river. The use of pillars carries on with his metaphor, as he explains that fortune can be "tamed" as a river can be directed with dams in order to prevent floodings. Here she is shown as encaged. These dams are preemptive measures a prince can take in order to prevent disasters by

fortune, such as building a strong military in case of an invasion or a strong relation with the people to prevent rebellion, both circumstances which can be brought upon by her.