

ought to converse, and whether her virtues should be such as to contribute to her conversation, I declare that I want her to understand what these gentlemen have said the courtier himself ought to know; and as for the activities we have said are unbecoming to her, I want her at least to have the understanding that people can have of things they do not practise themselves; and this so that she may know how to value and praise the gentlemen concerned in all fairness, according to their merits. And, to repeat in just a few words something of what has already been said, I want this lady to be knowledgeable about literature and painting, to know how to dance and play games, adding a discreet modesty and the ability to give a good impression of herself to the other principles that have been taught the courtier. And so when she is talking or laughing, playing or jesting, no matter what, she will always be most graceful, and she will converse in a suitable manner with whomever she happens to meet, making use of agreeable witticisms and jokes. And although continence, magnanimity, temperance, fortitude of spirit, prudence and the other virtues may not appear to be relevant in her social encounters with others, I want her to be adorned with these as well, not so much for the sake of good company, though they play a part in this too, as to make her truly virtuous, and so that her virtues, shining through everything she does, make her worthy of honour."

"I am quite surprised," said signor Gaspare with a laugh, "that since you endow women with letters, continence, magnanimity and temperance, you do not want them to govern cities as well, and to make laws and lead armies, while the men stay at home to cook and spin."

The Magnifico replied, also laughing: "Perhaps that would not be so bad, either."

Then he added: "Do you not know that Plato, who was certainly no great friend of women, put them in charge of the city and gave all the military duties to the men<sup>15</sup>? Don't you think that we might find many women just as capable of governing cities and armies as men? But I have not imposed these duties on them, since I am fashioning a Court lady and not a queen. I'm fully aware that you would like by implication to repeat the slander that signor Ottaviano<sup>16</sup> made against women yesterday, namely, that they are most imperfect creatures, incapable of any virtuous act, worth very little and quite without dignity compared with men. But truly both you and he would be very much in error if you really thought this." . . .

<sup>15</sup> Plato . . . to the men Plato reasoned that in the ideal state both men and women philosophers should rule (see Plato, *The Republic*).  
<sup>16</sup> signor Ottaviano Ottaviano Fregosa (d. 1524), a noble from Genoa; elected *doge*, or chief magistrate, of Genoa, in 1513; appointed governor of Genoa by King Francis I, of France.

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## NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

### Selections from *The Prince*

*The Prince* is a short and strikingly honest handbook on how to win power and keep it. Based on Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469–1527) personal experiences as diplomat and government employee (in the service of his beloved Florence), the book has become the foundation of modern political theory. In his other works, in particular his histories of Italy and Florence, Machiavelli drew upon his Classical education and personal experiences to develop this message: Learn from the past what works and what does not. But nowhere else does Machiavelli express his thesis so boldly and succinctly as in *The Prince*: "The end justifies any means."

*The Prince's* harsh and amoral attitude toward politics sparked controversies when first published. Many of Machiavelli's contemporaries, who were witnessing the end of the medieval Age of Faith and experiencing the dawn of a more secular time, were sharply divided over the meaning of his writings. Especially damaging to the book's reputation was its persistent low opinion of human nature. Succeeding generations have debated his analysis of human behavior and his consequent rationale for a strong government. In modern secular society, many readers have come to accept Machiavelli's view that political power, driven by personal or group interests, must be understood in utilitarian and practical terms.

*The Prince*, a treatise on the art of successful governing, is composed of three parts. The first part, comprising eleven chapters, categorizes and describes the various types of existing governments. The second part, which consists of fourteen chapters, offers advice and examples on

winning and maintaining political power. In these fourteen chapters, Machiavelli instructs the ruler on how to raise and organize armies, how to keep subjects loyal, and how to avoid the pitfalls of overconfidence and flattery. Throughout *The Prince*, the author compares and contrasts key traits that make a ruler a success or a failure. He also addresses the issue of fortune—what is now called opportunity—and emphasizes how often it affects a ruler. In the third part—the concluding chapter—Machiavelli calls upon “the prince” to unite the Italians against foreign oppressors and drive them from Italy.

### Reading the Selections

Chapters XV, XVI, and XVII appear in the second part of *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli discusses the most effective way for a ruler to govern his subjects. He points out that his discussion is rooted in practical politics, rather than based on imaginary regimes created by writers—a reference to the idealized commonwealths of Plato and medieval Christian authors. In Chapter XV, Machiavelli lists traits for which rulers are praised or blamed—such as being called stubborn or flexible, religious or skeptical—and notes that no ruler could continuously practice the best of these without damaging his ability to govern. Thus, in a crisis the ruler should not shrink from being blamed for vices if they are needed to safeguard the state, though most of the time, the prince should pretend to be what he is not in order to keep his subjects' loyalty.

★ In Chapter XVI, Machiavelli focuses on the traits of generosity and miserliness and shows, through ancient and current examples, the consequences for rulers who practiced one or the other of them. He concludes, given his dark view of human nature, that a ruler is better to be miserly than generous. In Chapter XVII, Machiavelli raises perhaps the most controversial question in the treatise: Is it better for the ruler to be loved or feared? Ideally, the ruler should be both loved and feared, but as this is nearly impossible, then the ruler should be feared. Machiavelli, realizing that fear has its limits, ends on a cautionary note: The “wise prince” must avoid being hated by his subjects, for hatred is the soil out of which rebellions grow.



## Chapter XV

### *The Things for Which Men, and Especially Princes, Are Praised or Blamed*

It now remains for us to see how a prince should govern his conduct towards his subjects or his friends. I know that this has often been written about before, and so I hope it will not be thought presumptuous for me to do so, as, especially in discussing this subject, I draw up an original set of rules. But since my intention is to say something that will prove of practical use to the inquirer, I have thought it proper to represent things as they are in real truth, rather than as they are imagined. Many have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation. The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore if a prince wants to maintain his rule he must learn how not to be virtuous, and to make use of this or not according to need.

So leaving aside imaginary things, and referring only to those which truly exist, I say that whenever men are discussed (and especially princes, who are more exposed to view), they are noted for various qualities which earn them either praise or condemnation. Some, for example, are held to be generous, and others miserly (I use the Tuscan<sup>1</sup> word rather than the word avaricious: we call a man who is mean with what he possesses, miserly, and a man who wants to plunder others, avaricious). Some are held to be benefactors, others are called grasping; some cruel, some compassionate; one man faithless, another faithful; one man effeminate and cowardly, another fierce and courageous; one man courteous, another proud; one man lascivious, another pure; one guileless, another crafty; one stubborn, another flexible; one grave, another frivolous;

<sup>1</sup> Tuscan Having to do with Tuscany, the Italian region, whose capital is Florence, Machiavelli's home.

to strangers in no way affects your standing at home; rather it increases it. You hurt yourself only when you give away what is your own. There is nothing so self-defeating as generosity: in the act of practising it, you lose the ability to do so, and you become either poor and despised or, seeking to escape poverty, rapacious and hated. A prince

should try to avoid, above all else, being despised and hated; and generosity results in your being both. Therefore it is wiser to incur the reputation of being a miser, which invites ignominy but not hatred, than to be forced by seeking a name for generosity to incur a reputation for rapacity, which brings you hatred as well as ignominy.

## Chapter XVII

### *Cruelty and Compassion; and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved Than Feared, or the Reverse*

Taking others of the qualities I enumerated above, I say that a prince should want to have a reputation for compassion rather than for cruelty; nonetheless, he should be careful that he does not make bad use of compassion. Cesare Borgia<sup>7</sup> was accounted cruel; nevertheless, this cruelty of his reformed the Romagna, brought it unity, and restored order and obedience. On reflection, it will be seen that there was more compassion in Cesare than in the Florentine people, who, to escape being called cruel, allowed Pistoia to be devastated.<sup>8</sup> So a prince should not worry if he incurs reproach for his cruelty so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal. By making an example or two he will prove more compassionate than those who, being too compassionate, allow disorders which lead to murder and rapine. These nearly always harm the whole community, whereas executions ordered by a prince only affect individuals. A new prince, of all rulers, finds it impossible to avoid a reputation for cruelty, because of the abundant dangers inherent in a newly won state. Vergil,<sup>9</sup> through the mouth of Dido,<sup>10</sup> says:

*Res dura, et regni novitas me talia cogunt  
Moliri, et late fines custode tueri.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cesare Borgia (1475/1476–1507) Member of an illustrious Italian family of Spanish origin. Son of Pope Alexander VI (d. 1503) by the Roman woman Vannozza Cattanei; appointed bishop of Pamplona in 1491, archbishop of Valencia in 1492, and cardinal in 1493; served as papal legate in 1497 and 1498; gave up cardinal's hat in 1498. Captain general of papal army in 1499; conquered, with French aid, Romagna and the Marches, 1499–1501; made duke by his father, 1501; seized Urbino in 1501; opposed by enemies, including Pope Julius II (elected 1503); imprisoned, 1504–1506; escaped and killed.

<sup>8</sup> Pistoia . . . devastated Pistoia was a subject-city of Florence, which forcibly restored order there when conflict broke out between two rival factions in 1501–1502. Machiavelli was concerned with this business at first hand.

<sup>9</sup> Vergil (70–19 B.C.) Roman poet (see *The Aeneid*).

<sup>10</sup> Dido Legendary Queen of Carthage. Originally a Phoenecian princess from Tyre, she fled to Africa and founded Carthage. Vergil made her tragic love affair with Aeneas, the founder of ancient Rome, the unifying theme for the first four books of the *Aeneid*.

<sup>11</sup> *Res . . . custode tueri.* "Harsh necessity, and the newness of my kingdom, force me to do such things and to guard my frontiers everywhere" *Aeneid* I, 563.

Nonetheless, a prince should be slow to take action, and should watch that he does not come to be afraid of his own shadow; his behaviour should be tempered by humanity and prudence so that over-confidence does not make him rash or excessive distrust make him unbearable.

From this arises the following question: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or the reverse. The answer is that one would like to be both the one and the other; but because it is difficult to combine them, it is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both. One can make this generalization about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit; while you treat them well, they are yours. They would shed their blood for you, risk their property, their lives, their children, so long, as I said above, as danger is remote; but when you are in danger they turn against you. Any prince who has come to depend entirely on promises and has taken no other precautions ensures his own ruin; friendship which is bought with money and not with greatness and nobility of mind is paid for, but it does not last and it yields nothing. Men worry less about doing an injury to one who makes himself loved than to one who makes himself feared. The bond of love is one which men, wretched creatures that they are, break when it is to their advantage to do so; but fear is strengthened by a dread of punishment which is always effective.

The prince should nonetheless make himself feared in such a way that, if he is not loved, at least he escapes being hated. For fear is quite compatible with an absence of hatred; and the prince can always avoid hatred if he abstains from the property of his subjects and citizens and from their women. If, even so, it proves necessary to execute someone, this should be done only when there is proper justification and manifest reason for it. But above all a prince should abstain from the property of others; because men sooner forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.<sup>12</sup> It is always possible to find pretexts for confiscating someone's property; and a prince who starts to live by rapine always finds pretexts for seiz-

<sup>12</sup> patrimony An estate inherited from one's father.

ing what belongs to others. On the other hand, pretexts for executing someone are harder to find and they are less easily sustained.

However, when a prince is campaigning with his soldiers and is in command of a large army then he need not worry about having a reputation for cruelty; because, without such a reputation, he can never keep his army united and disciplined. Among the admirable achievements of Hannibal<sup>13</sup> is included this: that although he led a huge army, made up of countless different races, on foreign campaigns, there was never any dissension, either among the troops themselves or against their leader, whether things were going well or badly. For this, his inhuman cruelty was wholly responsible. It was this, along with his countless other qualities, which made him feared and respected by his soldiers. If it had not been for his cruelty, his other qualities would not have been enough. The historians, having given little thought to this, on the one hand admire what Hannibal achieved, and on the other condemn what made his achievements possible.

That his other qualities would not have been enough by themselves can be proved by looking at Scipio,<sup>14</sup> a man unique in his own time and through all recorded history.

*Use of Roman  
military  
lit.*

<sup>13</sup> Hannibal (247–183 B.C.) Carthaginian general. In Second Punic War, led his troops from Spain, across the Alps, and into Italy, where he fought various battles and eventually marched on Rome, 218–211 B.C.; Romans held on and waited him out; recalled to Carthage in 203, and defeated at battle of Zama in 202 B.C.; headed Carthaginian government, 202–195 B.C.; fled to Asia Minor; committed suicide.

<sup>14</sup> Scipio Africanus (236–184/183 B.C.) Roman general. In Second Punic War, led army in Spain, 210–206 B.C.; led Roman invasion of Carthage; defeated Hannibal at battle of Zama in 202 B.C.

His armies mutinied against him in Spain, and the only reason for this was his excessive leniency, which allowed his soldiers more licence than was good for military discipline. Fabius Maximus<sup>15</sup> reproached him for this in the Senate and called him a corrupter of the Roman legions.<sup>16</sup> Again, when the Locri<sup>17</sup> were plundered by one of Scipio's officers, he neither gave them satisfaction nor punished his officer's insubordination; and this was all because of his having too lenient a nature. By way of excuse for him some senators argued that many men were better at not making mistakes themselves than at correcting them in others. But in time Scipio's lenient nature would have spoilt his fame and glory had he continued to indulge it during his command; when he lived under orders from the Senate, however, this fatal characteristic of his was not only concealed but even brought him glory.

So, on this question of being loved or feared, I conclude that since some men love as they please but fear when the prince pleases, a wise prince should rely on what he controls, not on what he cannot control. He should only endeavour, as I said, to escape being hated.

<sup>15</sup> Fabius Maximus (d. 203) Called *Cunctator*, the "Delayer." Roman general, famous for his delaying strategy against Hannibal in the Second Punic War. Fabius successfully made quick incursions against Hannibal's forces, while avoiding set battles. A group of English socialists in the late 1800s adopted the name Fabian in honor of this strategy.

<sup>16</sup> legions Roman army units, each composed of 3,000 to 6,000 foot soldiers with calvary.

<sup>17</sup> Locri Ancient city founded by the Greeks, located on the eastern side of the "toe" of Italy; Locri changed sides between Rome and its enemies until it was captured by Scipio Africanus and made Roman, in the Second Punic War.