

Machiavelli: The Prince

*The Medici ruled Florence for most of the fifteenth century, until 1494 when they were overthrown. Four years later, a republican government was set up, and Niccolo Machiavelli served the republic as a diplomat. Then, in 1512, the Medici returned to power, and Machiavelli was exiled to his farm outside of Florence. To regain political favor, he wrote, *The Prince*, an essay on the power politics of the day, which he hoped would help a strong ruler to unify Italy and to repel invasions by European powers. It became a handbook for aspiring political leaders. Machiavelli drew many of his examples from classical literature, as well as from his keen observations of Renaissance life.*

It is a good thing for a prince to be considered generous. But if generosity is concealed, no one will ever hear about it. Unless he advertises his generosity, the prince will become known as a miser. To earn a reputation as a generous prince, therefore, many men finance lavish displays and put on costly shows. But if a prince does this, he will spend most of his money on displays. If he is to continue to appear generous, he will have to impose heavy taxes and do everything possible to obtain more funds. This course of action will make his subjects begin to hate him; they will not even respect him because he will be poor. His generosity will have injured many and benefited only a few....For these reasons a prince must not worry if he becomes known as a miser....

Is it better for a prince to be loved more than feared? Or is it better to be feared more than loved? Ideally, a prince ought to be both feared and loved, but it is difficult for subjects to hold both sentiments toward their ruler. If one of the two must be sacrificed, it is much safer for a prince to be feared rather than loved. In general, men are ungrateful, dishonest, cowardly, and covetous. As long as you help them, they will do what you want them to do. They will offer you their blood, their goods, their lives, and their children when it appears that you will not need to take them up on their word. If a prince has relied solely on the good faith of others he will be ruined. Men are less afraid to offend a prince they love than on they fear...I conclude, therefore, that men have control of their love for a prince, but the prince, himself, controls their fear of him. The wise prince will rely on what he can control and not what others control. He must be careful, however, not to make men hate him.

Everyone knows that it is good thing for a prince to keep his word and live a faithful life. The history of our own times shows, however, that those princes who have done great things have not worried about keeping their word. A successful prince must imitate both the lion and the fox. In imitating the lion, the prince protects himself from wolves. In imitating the fox, he protects himself from traps....A prince ought not to keep his word if doing so would go against his best interests....If all men were good, this rule would not be a sound one. But because they are bad, and do not honor their word to the prince, he is not bound to keep his word....

It is not necessary for a prince to have all the good qualities that I have named, but it is necessary that he seem to have them. I will even go so far as to say that to actually have these qualities and to be guided by them always is dangerous. But to appear to have them is useful. It is well, therefore, to seem merciful, faithful, sincere, religious, and also to be so. But a prince must be always ready to have the opposite qualities if need be. New princes, particularly, fail when they have these good qualities. In order to maintain their power they often must act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion. A prince must be ready to shift with the wind as the ups and downs of fortune require. He should not go against what is good if he can avoid it, but he should be ready and able to do evil when necessary.

I conclude, then, that if fortune continues to vary and men remain basically the same, princes will be successful so long as their ways fit the circumstances. But when times call for other tactics, they will fail unless they follow a new course. I certainly think it is better to act impetuously than to act cautiously, for fortune is a woman, and if the prince wishes to master her, he must conquer her by force. She is overcome by the bold rather than by those who proceed coldly. And, therefore, like a woman, she is always a friend to the young because they are less cautious, more fierce, and master her with greater audacity (daring).