

## **Excerpts from Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1513)**

*Note: Machiavelli hoped to impress, and get a job working for the powerful Medici family in Florence with this work on politics. It didn't work, but it has proved to be a much loathed and admired analysis of human affairs from a coldly realist point of view. When Machiavelli speaks of a "prince," he does not mean the son of a king, but is using the word in its older meaning "the first," or the ruler of a territory. Italy was divided into many small city-states and other domains, which were in constant competition with each other. When the translator uses the term "faith" and "keeping faith," he does not mean religious faith, but honesty and keeping promises. Breaking faith, in this sense, means breaking promises, or acting deceptively.*

### **From Chapter 15: *On those things for which men and especially princes are praised or criticized***

... But since my intent is to write a thing that is useful for whoever understands it, it seemed to me more appropriate to go after the effectual truth of the thing than the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth. For there is such a distance from how one lives to how one ought to live that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done learns what will ruin him rather than what will save him, since a man who would wish to make a career of being good in every detail must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary for a prince, if he wishes to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this faculty and not to use it according to necessity.

Thus, leaving behind the things that have been imagined about a prince, and discussing those that are true, I say that all men, when they are spoken about, and especially princes, because they are placed higher, are noted for some of the following qualities, which bring them either blame or praise. That is to say that one man is held liberal, one a miser; one is held a giver, one rapacious; one cruel, one compassionate. The one is held a breaker of faith, the other faithful; the one effeminate and pusillanimous, the other fierce and spirited . . .

### **From Chapter 17: *On cruelty and compassion, and whether it is better to be loved than to be feared, or the contrary***

Descending next to the other qualities mentioned before, I say that each prince ought to desire to be believed compassionate, and not cruel, nonetheless he must be alert not to use this compassion badly. Cesare Borgia was believed cruel; nonetheless, that cruelty of his restored the Romagna, unified it, and led it back to peace and to faith . . . A prince, therefore, must not care about the infamy of cruelty in keeping his subjects united and faithful, because if he makes a very few examples, he will be more compassionate than those who, through too much compassion, allow disorders to occur from which arise killings and robberies. For the latter usually harm an entire population, but those executions that come from the prince harm a particular person . . .

From the above a debate arises whether it is better to be loved than feared or the contrary. The answer is that one would want to be both the one and the other, but because it is difficult to join them together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one has to do without one of the two. For the following may be said generally about men; that they are ungrateful, changeable, pretenders and dissemblers, avoiders of dangers, and desirous of gain, and while

you do them good they are wholly yours, offering you their blood, their property, their life, and their children, as I said above, when the need is far off, but when it comes close to you they revolt. And that prince who has founded himself wholly on their words, because he finds himself naked of other preparations, is ruined. For the friendships that are acquired at a price, and not with greatness and nobility of spirit, are paid for but they are not possessed, and when they come due they cannot be used. Men have less fear of offending one who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared, since love is held in place by a bond of obligation which, because men are wretched, is broken at every opportunity for utility to oneself, but fear is held in place by a fear of punishment that never abandons you.

Nevertheless, the prince must make himself feared in such a way that, although he does not acquire love, he avoids hatred . . .

### **From Chapter 18: *In what way faith should be kept by princes***

How laudable it is in a prince to maintain faith and to live with integrity and not with cleverness, everyone understands. Nonetheless, one sees from experience in our own times that those princes have done great things who have held faith of small account, and who have known how, with their cleverness, to trick men's brains, and at the end they have surpassed those who founded themselves on sincerity.

You should know, therefore, that there are two kinds of combat: one with laws, and the other with force. The first one is proper to man, the second is proper to beasts. But because many times the first is not enough, one must have recourse to the second. For a prince, therefore, it is necessary to know well how to use both the beast and the man. . .

Thus, since it is necessary for a prince to know well how to use the beast, from among the beasts he should choose the fox and the lion., for the lion does not defend himself from traps, and the fox does not defend himself from wolves. He must, therefore, be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to awe the wolves. Those who simply stick with the methods of the lion do not understand this. Therefore a prudent lord cannot, nor should he, observe faith when such observance turns against himself, and when the reasons that made him promise it are eliminated. And if men were all good, this precept would not be good; but because they are wicked, and they would not observe faith for you, you too do not have to observe it with them. Nor does a prince ever lack legitimate reasons for painting over his inobservance. Of this one could give infinite modern examples, and show how many peaces, how many promises have been made void and vain by the faithlessness of princes. And the one who has known better how to use the fox has come out better. But it is necessary to know how to color this nature well, and to be a great pretender and dissembler, and men are so very simple, and they so well obey present necessities, that he who deceives will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived.

. . .It is useful to seem compassionate, faithful, humane, honest, religious—and to be so, but to stay so constructed in your spirit that if it is necessary not be these things, you are able and know how to become the contrary. And one must understand the following: that a prince, and especially a new prince cannot observe all of those things for which men are believed good, since to maintain his state he is often required to act against faith, against charity, against humaneness, and against religion. And for this reason he needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and the variation of things command him, and, as I said above, not to depart from the good if he is able, but to know how to enter into evil when he needs to.