

The Emergence of Modern Nations

53 ADVICE TO PRINCES

Niccolò Machiavelli's best known work, The Prince, recorded the rules of the game of power politics. To stay in power, Machiavelli said, rulers would have to ignore the lofty ideals of politics—honesty, justice, honor, magnanimity, and so on—and adopt whatever means necessary. In the excerpt below, Machiavelli offers advice on the kinds of qualities a prudent ruler should possess. As you read the excerpt, ask yourself how useful Machiavelli's advice would be to rulers in today's world.

Chapter XIV How a ruler should act concerning military matters

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A ruler, then, should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else except war and its methods and practices, for this pertains only to those who rule. And it is of such efficacy that it not only maintains hereditary rulers in power but very often enables men of private status to become rulers. On the other hand, it is evident that if rulers concern themselves more with the refinements of life than with military matters, they lose power. The main reason why they lose it is their neglect of the art of war; and being proficient in this art is what enables one to gain power.

Because Francesco Sforza was armed, from being a private citizen he became Duke of Milan; since his descendants did not trouble themselves with military matters, from being dukes they became private citizens. For being unarmed (apart from other bad consequences) results in your being despised, which is one of those disgraceful things against which a ruler must always guard. . . . There is an enormous difference between an armed man and an unarmed man; and it cannot be expected that a man who is armed will obey willingly a man who is unarmed, or that an unarmed man can be safe among armed servants. Since the latter will be contemptuous and the former suspicious and afraid, they will not be able to work well together. Therefore, apart from the other disadvantages already mentioned, a ruler who does not understand military matters cannot be highly regarded by his soldiers, and he cannot trust them.

A controversy has arisen about this: whether it is better to be loved than feared, or vice versa. My view is that it is desirable to be both loved and feared; but it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved.

For this may be said of men generally: they are ungrateful, fickle, feigners and dissemblers, avoiders of danger, eager for gain. While you benefit them they are all devoted to you: they would shed their blood for you; they offer their possessions, their lives, and their sons . . . when the need to do so is far off. But when you are hard pressed, they turn away. A ruler who has relied completely on their promises, and has neglected to prepare other defences, will be ruined, because friendships that are acquired with money, and not through greatness and nobility of character, are paid for but not secured, and prove unreliable just when they are needed.

Men are less hesitant about offending or harming a ruler who makes himself loved than one who inspires fear. For love is sustained by a bond of gratitude which, because men are excessively self-interested, is broken whenever they see a chance to benefit themselves. But fear is sustained by a dread of punishment that is always effective. Nevertheless, a ruler must make himself feared in such a way that, even if he does not become loved, he does not become hated. For it is perfectly possible to be feared without incurring hatred. And this can always be achieved if he refrains from laying hands on the property of his citizens and subjects, and on their womenfolk. If it is necessary to execute anyone, this should be done only if there is a proper justification and obvious reason. But, above all, he must not touch the property of others, because men forget sooner the killing of a father than the loss of their patrimony [property].

Chapter XVIII

How rulers should keep their promises

Everyone knows how praiseworthy it is for a ruler to keep his promises, and live uprightly and not by trickery. Nevertheless, experience shows that in our times the rulers who have done great things are those who have set little store by keeping their word, being skilful rather in cunningly confusing men; they have got the better of those who have relied on being trustworthy.

You should know, then, that there are two ways of contending: one by using laws, the other, force. The first is appropriate for men, the second for animals; but because the former is often ineffective, one must have recourse to the latter. Therefore, a ruler must know well how to imitate beasts as well as employing properly human means. . . .

Since a ruler, then, must know how to act like a beast, he should imitate both the fox and the lion, for the lion is liable to be trapped, whereas the fox cannot ward off wolves. One needs, then, to be a fox to recognise traps, and a lion to frighten away wolves. Those who rely merely upon a lion's strength do not understand matters.

Therefore, a prudent ruler cannot keep his word, nor should he, when such fidelity would damage him, and when the reasons that made him promise are no longer relevant. This advice would not be sound if all men were upright; but because they are treacherous and would not keep their promises to you, you should not consider yourself bound to keep our promises to them.

Moreover, plausible reasons can always be found for such failure to keep promises. One could give countless modern examples of this, and how how many peace treaties and promises have been rendered null and void by the faithlessness of rulers; and those best able to imitate the fox have succeeded best. But foxiness should be well concealed: one must be a great feigner and dissembler. And men are so naive, and so much dominated by immediate needs, that a skilful deceiver always finds plenty of people who will let themselves be deceived. . . .

A ruler, then, should be very careful [about] everything he says . . . : to those who see and hear him, he should seem to be exceptionally merciful, trustworthy, upright, humane and devout. And it is most necessary of all to seem devout. In these matters, most men judge more by their eyes than by their hands. For everyone is capable of seeing you, but few can touch you. Everyone can see what you appear to be, whereas few have direct experience of what you really are; and those few will not dare to challenge the popular view, sustained as it is by the majesty of the ruler's position.

READING REVIEW

1. According to Machiavelli why is it safer for a ruler to be feared than loved?
2. What advice does Machiavelli give about why a prudent ruler should not keep promises?
3. Do you think that today's world leaders should follow the rules Machiavelli set down in *The Prince*? Why or why not?

54 LUTHER'S REFUSAL AT THE DIET OF WORMS

After he had been excommunicated by Pope Leo X, Martin Luther was summoned by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to appear before the Imperial Diet at Worms in 1521. There, he was given an opportunity to renounce his ideas. However, in a dramatic encounter with imperial rulers and church theologians, Luther refused to recant. The excerpt below from Documents of the Christian Church, edited by Henry Rottenson, contains part of this exchange between Luther