

The Practical Politician

*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 Niccolò Machiavelli served the republic as a diplomat. Then, in 1512, the Medici returned to power, and Machiavelli was exiled to his farm outside 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.*

2 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.
4 To earn a reputation as a generous prince, therefore, many men
finance lavish displays and put on costly shows. But if a prince
6 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
8 and do everything possible to obtain more funds. This course of
action will make his subjects begin to hate him; they will not even
10 respect him because he will be poor. His generosity will have in-
jured many and benefited only a few. . . . For these reasons a prince
12 must not worry if he becomes known as a miser. . . .

14 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
16 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 gen-
18 eral, men are ungrateful, dishonest, cowardly, and covetous. As
long as you help them, they will do what you want them to do.
20 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
22 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
24 than one they fear. . . .

26 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.
28 He must be careful, however, not to make men hate him.

30 Everyone knows that it is a 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, sin-
cere, religious, and also to be so. But a prince must be always ready
to have the opposite qualities if need be. New princes, particularly,
fall 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 re-
main 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].

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The
Prince*, G. C. Sansoni, ed.
Florence: 1899.
Translated by Edwin Fenton.

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From Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486)

Source: <http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/Mirandola/>

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TO STUDENTS: *Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man has been called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance" due to its articulation of the core values held by many humanists. In this preface to his 900 theses on religion and philosophy, Pico employs syncretism (the fusion of the Christian and classical traditions) in his praise of man and of man's free will.*

Most esteemed Fathers, I have read in the ancient writings of the Arabians that Abdala the Saracen on being asked what, on this stage, so to say, of the world, seemed to him most evocative of wonder, replied that there was nothing to be seen more marvelous than man. And that celebrated exclamation of Hermes Trismegistus, "What a great miracle is man, Asclepius" confirms this opinion....

Why, I asked, should we not admire the angels themselves and the beatific choirs more? At long last, however, I feel that I have come to some understanding of why man is the most fortunate of living things and, consequently, deserving of all admiration; of what may be the condition in the hierarchy of beings assigned to him, which draws upon him the envy, not of the brutes alone, but of the astral beings and of the very intelligences which dwell beyond the confines of the world....

God the Father, the Mightiest Architect, had already raised, according to the precepts of His hidden wisdom, this world we see, the cosmic dwelling of divinity, a temple most august. He had already adorned the supercelestial region with Intelligences, infused the heavenly globes with the life of immortal souls and set the fermenting dung-heap of the inferior world teeming with every form of animal life. But when this work was done, the Divine Artificer still longed for some creature which might comprehend the meaning of so vast an achievement, which might be moved with love at its beauty and smitten with awe at its grandeur. When, consequently, all else had been completed (as both Moses and Timaeus testify), in the very last place, He bethought Himself of bringing forth man. Truth was, however, that there remained no archetype according to which He might fashion a new offspring, nor in His treasure-houses the wherewithal to endow a new son with a fitting inheritance, nor any place, among the seats of the universe, where this new creature might dispose himself to contemplate the world. All space was already filled; all things had been distributed in the highest, the middle and the lowest orders. Still, it was not in the nature of the power of the Father to fail in this last creative élan; nor was it in the nature of that supreme Wisdom to hesitate through lack of counsel in so crucial a matter; nor, finally, in the nature of His beneficent love to compel the creature destined to praise the divine generosity in all other things to find it wanting in himself.

At last, the Supreme Maker decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him:

"We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."

Oh unsurpassed generosity of God the Father, Oh wondrous and unsurpassable felicity of man, to whom it is granted to have what he chooses, to be what he wills to be!