

Romeo and Juliet Part I

Machiavelli

Ethics Workbook I: World History, Chapter 10

After about a thousand years of feudalism, people began to question some of its basic ideas. This new period in history is called the Renaissance. It was a time of change in the way people looked at their relationship with the community they lived in. Communalism was losing ground to the idea of *individualism*. Individualism stresses the importance of the individual people and places them above the group. People began to believe that there was nothing wrong with striving to get things for themselves and they became less concerned about their obligations to others.

The Renaissance was the beginning of what we call modern times. We still live in the modern age and our society today still stresses individualism. So, this is a very important idea for us to study. It's a new way to look at life and it changes things a lot.

All through the Middle Ages it was assumed that, for the most part at least, people try to do the right thing. In other words, people were by nature basically good. This was one idea that was seriously questioned by Renaissance thinkers. One famous philosopher at this time was an Italian named Nicolo Machiavelli. He wrote a book called *The Prince* which gave advice to political leaders. Let's see what Machiavelli said about the natural goodness of people.

In general, people are ungrateful, unreliable, false, cowardly and greedy. They will promise you anything and then turn their back on you if things go wrong. And don't think that the person who is closest to you is more reliable. Friendship is based on obligations and people break obligations most easily.

Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter XVI simplified

What do you think? Are people basically good or basically bad? Is Machiavelli right?

can't fight off the wolves. Great leaders don't rely on either one or the other, but use both. Therefore, the wise leaders do not keep their word if it will hurt them or prevent them from getting what they want.

If people were good, this rule would not hold. But, because they are bad and will lie and cheat you, you are not obligated to be fair and honest with them.

But, it is necessary to disguise your dishonesty and to pretend to be good. People like to think that they are upright, and they are very easy to trick. You must appear to be virtuous, but only a fool actually is virtuous. Pretend to be kind, reliable, fair, honest and loyal. But be ready to do the exact opposite, as long as you don't get caught. It's always best to stay with the good if you can, but only if it works, if not, you must be ready to change tactics. Remember, people must believe you are virtuous, so never give any hint that you are not. People only see what you show them, not what's really there.

Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chapter XVIII simplified

What was Machiavelli's opinion of hypocrisy?

It seems that winning is the most important thing for Machiavelli. *How important is winning in the things that you do? Does the urge to win sometimes lead to unethical actions? Can you give any examples from your own experiences?*

Now let's see what Machiavelli says in a chapter of his book called: "Concerning Cruelty And Clemency, And Whether It Is Better To Be Loved Than Feared." Read it carefully and use it to establish standards for judging the actions of Prince Escalus of Verona. *What would Machiavelli have told the Prince to do?*

Coming now to the other qualities mentioned above, I say that every prince ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Nevertheless he ought to take care not to misuse this clemency. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; notwithstanding, his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty. And if this be rightly considered, he will be seen to have been much more merciful than the Florentine people, who, to avoid a reputation for cruelty, permitted Pistoia to be destroyed. Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are wont to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only. ...

Nevertheless he ought to be slow to believe and to act, nor should he himself show fear, but proceed in a temperate manner with prudence and humanity, so that too much confidence may not make him incautious and too much distrust render him intolerable.

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with. Because this is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life and children, as is said above, when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is

