THE BOOK OF THE BODY POLITIC
PART ONE

On Princes

Here begins the Book of the Body Politic which speaks of virtue and manners* and is divided into three parts. The first part is addressed to princes,* the second to knights and nobles, and the third to the universal people.

Chapter 1 The first chapter gives the description of the Body Politic

If it is possible for vice to give birth to virtue, it pleases me in this part to be as passionate as a woman, since many men assume that the female sex does not know how to silence the abundance of their spirits. Come boldly, then and be shown the many inexhaustible springs and fountains of my courage, which cannot be stanched when it expresses the desire for virtue.

Oh, Virtue, noble and godly, how can I dare to flaunt myself by speaking of you, when I know that my understanding neither comprehends nor expresses you well?

But what comforts me and makes me bold is that I sense that you are so kind that it will not displease you if I speak of you, not about what is most subtle, but only in those areas which I can conceive or comprehend. So, I will speak about you as far as it concerns the teaching of good morals, by speaking first of the industry and rule of life* for our superiors; that is, princes, whose majesties I humbly supplicate not to take wrongly nor disdain such a small intelligence as mine, that such a humble creature dares
undertake to speak about the way of life for higher ranks.* And may it please them to remember the teaching of the Philosopher, who said, “Do not disdain the wise words of the insignificant despite your own high position.” Next, by the grace of God, I hope to speak on the manner of life of knights and nobles. And then, thirdly, on the whole universal people.

These three types of estate ought to be one polity like a living body according to the words of Plutarch* who in a letter which he sent to the Emperor Trajan compared the polity to a body having life. There the prince and princes hold the place of the head in as much as they are or should be sovereign* and from them ought to come particular institutions just as from the mind of a person springs forth the external deeds that the limbs achieve. The knights and nobles take the place of the hands and arms. Just as a person’s arms have to be strong in order to endure labor, so they have the burden of defending the law of the prince and the polity. They are also the hands because, just as the hands push aside harmful things, so they ought push all harmful and useless things aside. The other kinds of people are like the belly, the feet, and the legs. Just as the belly receives all that the head and the limbs prepare for it, so, too, the activity of the prince and nobles ought to return to the public good, as will be better explained later. Just as the legs and feet sustain the human body, so, too, the laborers sustain all the other estates.*

Chapter 2 Which describes how virtuous felicity is symbolized

First we have to discuss virtue, to the benefit of the rule of life for the three different estates. Virtue must regulate human life in all its works. Without it, no one can have honor. Whatever the degree of honor, Valerius* says, honor is the plentiful food of virtue. And on this subject, Aristotle* said, “Reverence is due to honor as a testimony of virtue,” which means that honor must not be attributed but to a virtuous person, because he is not speaking about the powerful nor about the rich, but the virtuous. According to him, only the good are honored. Nothing is more desired by noble hearts than honor. As he says himself in the fourth book of the Ethics, neither power nor riches is without honor. Now it is true that kings and powerful princes are especially invested with honor, and as a consequence,
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virtue, so it is appropriate to distinguish the aspects of virtue. In chapter 20 of his book, The City of God, St. Augustine* says that the philosophers say that virtue is the objective of all human good and evil. That is, human happiness comes from being virtuous.

Now it is fitting that there is great delight in happiness, otherwise it would not be happiness, and this joy and happiness ancient philosophers described and symbolized in this manner: Felicity is a very beautiful and refined queen seated on a royal throne, and the virtues are seated around her and look at her, waiting to hear her commands, to serve her, and to obey. She commands Prudence to inquire how she can stay healthy and in good condition so that she can reign a long time. And she commands Justice to do everything that she should and keep the laws so that there will be peace. And she commands Courage that if any pain should come to her body, to moderate it by resisting it with virtuous thought. She commands Temperance to take wine, food and other delectable things in moderation so that anything she takes is for a reason and not to her detriment. This description allows one to understand that to be virtuous is nothing more than to have in one everything that attracts good and which pushes away evil and vice. Thus, in order to govern the body of the public polity well, it is necessary for the head to be healthy, that is, virtuous. Because if it is ill, the whole body will feel it. Therefore we begin by speaking of medicine for the head, that is, for the king or princes, and, since this is a work beginning with the head, we will take first the “head” of age, that is the childhood of the prince who is brought up on the responsibility of his parents.

Chapter 3 This tells how one ought to bring up the children of princes

Because we are expressly commanded to love God, the first thing is to introduce the child of the prince to this love very early and to teach him simple little prayers appropriate to the understanding of the child.

For things taught early in childhood are lost with difficulty. Such things are agreeable to God; the Psalmist says “The Lord has perfect praise in the mouth of children and sucklings,” that is, He approves of it. As he gets older he should learn his letters and to follow the religious service. God be praised, to teach their children to hear
Mass* and to say their Hours* has been the praiseworthy custom of the princes of France more than in other places.

Also one ought to provide a tutor who is wise and prudent more in morals than in lofty learning, despite the fact that in ancient times, the children of princes were taught by philosophers. For example, Philip, king of Macedon and father of the great Alexander,* wrote to Aristotle that while he had had great joy when a male infant was born to him, he had a greater joy yet that he was born at this time so that he could be instructed and taught by Aristotle who eventually was the teacher of Alexander the Great. Nevertheless, because at present princes do not desire to be educated in the sciences* as they used to be and as I would wish it pleased God that they were, I believe that it would be better to have a very discrete and wise tutor, who had good morals and loved God, rather than the most excellent and subtle philosopher. Yet it would be much more praiseworthy to find a perfect one who was a notable scholar as well.

And so princes ought to carefully search for one because the good morals that the child sees in his tutor, and the wise words and countenance he experiences provide both an education and a mirror* for him. So the wise tutor ought to conduct himself with great prudence in such an office, because despite the fact that it is a child’s nature not to learn except out of fear of punishment, nevertheless, it is good that the child of the prince be brought to fear in other ways than severe beatings.* For too strict a correction in a child that is brought up in pleasures and who already senses the power of authority because of the honor that others pay him could lead, instead of to correction, to indignation towards learning as well as towards his tutor, which would undermine his discipline, to the detriment of the tutor and, perhaps, of the health of the delicately raised child. But what should the wise tutor do? He ought to follow the example of the lion, because it is the custom to raise the children of princes with other children, sons of barons, who are all his pupils. He ought to be severe with them when they misbehave and beat them as is customary but threaten them more by severe expression than by beatings, and likewise to use threats on the prince’s son if he does not correct himself. At some point, let him feel the rod, and by this see to it that he is ashamed of his misdeed, fearful, and obedient.

The wise tutor ought not to be too familiar with or too close to his pupils because they will fear him less, and the child should not
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see him play games, laugh, or speak foolishly, but, instead that he is not too familiar with anyone but is half school master to everyone. And his countenance should be dignified and firm, and his dress be clean and honorable. In front of his pupil, he should not speak empty words but profitable ones, and give good examples; however, he should not always have a sour face and proud words. He ought to welcome him with gentle words when he does well which will reward him if he does something good. The master shall give him these little things that delight children, or sometimes tell him childish stories or something that makes them laugh. The purpose of all that is that he love his tutor as well as his studies. The master should regulate the day well, and arrange time and rules for the child to begin and end school, and then give him some time to play before his dinner, which should be orderly, and not too rich or delicate in meats and wines, which to some degree can cause corruption or illness. And when the child comes to learn his grammar* then the tutor should begin to use a bit more subtle words and teaching, according to how he sees what the child is able to understand, and thus, little by little, teach more and more, just as a nurse increases the food of the child according to his growth.

Truly, I believe that the prince would want to have his child to be introduced to learning so that he knows the rules of grammar and understands Latin, which if pleased God, I would wish were generally the custom for all children of princes at present and for the future, because I believe that the greater good would ensue and virtue would increase for them and their subjects. So they should have their children learn as much as possible, to advance as far as Logic, and then have them continue if they can. So the very wise prince, the duke of Orleans, did and used to do for his children, as he was asked by the very wise, good, and virtuous duchess, his wife, who values and honors education and knowledge, and like a prudent mother is careful that letters and all the virtues are being learned by her children.

With the wise tutor described above, when the understanding of the child begins to grow and to understand better, then he ought to feed him more advanced learning and manners by giving him examples or having him read in books. And he ought to make him understand the difference between good and evil, and teach and show him the path to follow in good morals, manners, and virtue as the valiant and renowned princes, his predecessors, and others did, and
show him the great good which comes from being good and governing oneself well, and also the opposite; the evil which comes to the bad or vicious. And if he seems at all inclined or talented in learning, he ought to encourage him through pleasant words and reasons, so that he will understand the great happiness to be found in learning, opening up for him the path to philosophy, and making him appreciate and understand it. And if he has such a tutor at the beginning, if he continues with such learning when he comes of age the son of the prince will have excellence in virtue and great fame.

Chapter 4 On the sort of person to be entrusted with the governing of the children of princes

When the son of the prince has grown older, then he ought to be separated from the women who have cared for him and his care ought to be entrusted principally to one older knight of great authority, and one ought to carefully look to see that he is wise, loyal, prudent, and of good manner of life, and that he have similar persons around him. This knight must take as much or more diligent care of the habits* of the child as he does of his body. So he ought to take care that he rises early; that he hears Mass, says his Hours, has a pleasant and confident expression, speaks well to people, greets them kindly, gives to everyone the honor due to his position. This knight ought often to show him what the honor and valor of knighthood is, and tell him the great deeds of many worthy knights. He ought to make him recognize who is good and who is the better in his father's household and who he ought to honor the most. And he ought to show him and teach him the emblems of arms and order of battles and chivalry, how to fight, to attack, to defend, and for what quarrels one must take arms and fight, what armor is the best, strongest, and most sure, and most comfortable, and he ought to explain to him why it is so and how one should arm according to the kind of battle, what arms one would use, how one fought in times past and how now, how to determine who is good and worthy, and to attract them to oneself, to honor them, and to love them.

The knight ought to take care that there be neither great nor humble tellers of dishonest or evil ideas around the son of the prince when he has grown older, and that they not introduce the prince to folly. And he ought to take care that the children who are around
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him are well brought up, so that he is not induced to do wrong or to childish folly. If the child of the prince does wrong he should correct him, saying that it is not appropriate to his rank for the prince to do this, and that if he does not change he will encounter shame and blame, and that a prince without honor is worth nothing, and that if he does not desire to be governed this way, that he will have to leave. And thus he ought to counsel, tell, and admonish him often, and in this way the sons of princes and lords ought to be governed if they desire to be honorable in the future. Valerius affirms this for us in his book which speaks of how the ancients introduced the young to good manners, to withstand hardship, and to be honorable and brave. He told of the chivalry and bravery of the good, and gave good examples, telling them that nothing leads to honor as well as virtue.

At meals, he has songs sung about the deeds of the noble dead and the good deeds of their ancestors so that the will of the young person is made courageous. Valerius says that the ancients taught bravery, chivalry and good manners this way in their schools. These schools, he says, resulted in the Caesars and the noble families, renowned for accomplishments and bravery. And there is no doubt that good example and wise advice often heard and seen in childhood can cause a man to grow up excellent in all virtue, and similarly, by evil teaching one can be brought to the way of perdition. As Averroës says in the second book of Physics, one can acquire a second nature by long habit of good or evil, and that is why parents ought to keep children from bad habits in youth as much as they can, for, says Orosius, an earthenware pot keeps the odor of what it contained for a long time. It is because of this that the ancient Greeks who governed themselves with great learning and cleverness, took great pains to ensure that the people whom they hated delighted in evil habits, and this gave them the means to be avenged on them.

Chapter 5 The exhortations that one ought to make to children of princes

While he is a child, the son of the prince also ought to be brought sometimes to the court, where the wise and the councillors who determine the needs of the country are assembled, in order to hear the cases that come before them and the methods of good government of the polity, so that the child will be led to hear about the
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deeds and the governance of the realm that he is heir to, and will learn to speak about and to discuss these things. And the knights and the wise who are in the government ought to tell him to listen and remember what they say about this.

His guardians ought to speak in front of him about all kinds of unfamiliar things: different countries, the customs of warriors, battles, the rulers of many places, different weapons, and also the clergy, the Pope and the church. Theologians ought to speak to him about the law of the commandments and what one ought to hold and believe as a Christian, and sometimes he ought to hear sermons and reflections by clerics. He ought to hear sometimes about the common people, laborers, and merchants, how they make their profit from the poor and the rich, and similarly all kinds of things, so that his understanding is not found ignorant of anything that can be virtuously known. For the Philosopher says that he only is wise who understands everything. Also, it is good for him sometimes to exercise his body both in some work and in some suitable games like tennis and similar sports, but not too much, only so that he does not become too heavy and fat from too much rest, so that he accumulates superfluous humors. Likewise one ought to speak to him about the poor and indigent and show them to him and tell him to have pity and compassion on them and do good to them for the love of God if he wants to gain paradise. Also that he should pity poor gentlewomen, widows, and orphans and succor their needs for the love of God and out of kindness; and also all poor women and men in his power and to hear their requests kindly.

And one must teach him to be kind, humble, and truthful, tell him that despite that by the grace and will of God, he has been raised to high rank, he is as mortal as any other, and he will keep nothing with him but the good and evil that he has done, and that much is required from those given much. He ought not to be arrogant or proud in his heart, even though given great honors, but he should above all give thanks to God from whom the benefits he receives come, as he ought to recognize. Thus, he ought to hear many such admonishments to good and virtuous conduct. Yet despite this, one ought to allow the son of the prince to play and divert himself as mentioned before. And it must not be forgotten to encourage him in the virtues and in good manners.
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Chapter 6 Here it tells what the young prince should do when he begins to govern

When the time comes that the son of the prince has grown, and come of age to rule, and comes into his heritage by succession, whether it is a kingdom or another lordship, just as the fruit appears after the tree blossoms, so in him ought to appear the perfection of virtue, following the example of the wise king of France, Charles V. Because from the moment of his coronation, even though it was in the flower of his youth, no one could find anything dishonest in him and he occupied his time in suitable and virtuous things. I have plainly spoken elsewhere of him in my book on his deeds and good manners.

The virtues of a prince are seen in three things, without which he will not achieve this crown of reputation, good name, and consequently, honor. The first and most important, is to love, fear, and serve God without dishonesty, but with good deeds rather than spending time withdrawn in long prayers.

Another is this: he ought solely to love the good and benefit of his country and his people. All his ability, power, and the study of his free time ought to be for this, rather than his own benefit. The third is that he must love justice above all, guarding it and keeping it without restraint, and must do equity to all people. By keeping these three points well, the prince will be crowned with glory in heaven and on earth.

Now we will continue our work as before: Just as part 1 speaks of the head, that is the prince or princes, so we continue to discuss the first of our three points. From the first which is to love God, we will follow the many branches of virtue which stem from it, and likewise, the other two points.

Chapter 7 The wise advice that is suitable for a young prince

The young prince who loves God will be afraid to do anything against His reverence and commandment, and will work hard to know everything that he ought to do and what he should avoid. Thus he will learn to perceive and comprehend his fragility as a mortal human, subject to a brief life, impassioned by transient mortal affairs and as frail as any other person, no different except for the gifts of fortune.