

Jeffrey Carlyle

Dr. Meredig

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People are Scum

Many of the works read in World Cultures 102 to some degree have the underlying message that “people are scum.” For instance in More in *Utopia*, Luther in *Christian Liberty*, and Machiavelli in *The Prince* all say that people are bad—that no matter what is done bad things will happen; however, all three authors approached the subject differently.

Machiavelli has hardest “people are scum” message. The entire book outlines ways to take advantage of other people. Through examination of history, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* as a handbook of how things had worked in the past, and—he believed—would work again in the future. Machiavelli makes suggestions like if one wished to eliminate their competition the should do so quickly instead of allowing deaths and trials to drag on forever, because people are more likely to forget something that happened quickly. Machiavelli believed that people are bad, and that to get ahead in life one should take advantage of others.

If it were capable to ask Thomas More directly if he believed people were scum he would most likely say no. He believed that if people were treated openly and honestly they would do the same for you; More is definitely very non-Machiavellian. However, More also accepted that people would do bad things. In his perfect societies mentioned in *Utopia* he set forth ways which people who did not follow the rules were dealt with—and most often this retribution was quite harsh. From the monologue of

Raphael in the first part of the book it is obvious that More believes that at the time of his writing the world was not in good condition; however, he believed that people could be reformed. The last paragraph of the book exposes this belief: "But I freely admit that there are many features of the Utopian Republic which I should like—though I hardly expect—to see adopted in Europe."

In *Christian Liberty*, Luther states his belief that all people will sin—in other words human are incapable of not doing bad things. Within the first few paragraphs of *Christian Liberty*, Luther states the entire problem with human existence: the two-fold nature of the man. Man has both a bodily component and a spiritual component. Luther quotes Galatians 5:17 to support his argument: "for the desires of flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh." Luther's belief is that the bodily side of man will cause him to bad things and that is inevitable. He also wrote that if the person was able to maintain a strong spiritual side that that would win out over the temptations of flesh and eventually create a good person—a person capable of eternal salvation.

As always what the definite truth lies somewhere amidst what various observers see as being the truth. From my own personal observation and experience, I can see the strengths in the beliefs of each of the three authors. I have been it situations where it was best to take advantage of others to get what I desires. I have also experienced times of temptation of flesh: I wanted something, but deep down inside my being I knew it was best that I not give into this temptation. On other occasions, I have found myself wondering how things would be different if we had not all been raised the way we were—there is almost no barrier between education and indoctrination. In the end my belief is that "people are scum;" however, almost

paradoxically people are wonderful. They are capable of knowing that they are bad and therefore capable of trying to correct what is wrong.