

# MORAL EXHORTATION

*La Rochefoucauld*

kind	noble
	justice
honest	chastity
brave	temperance
shrewd	modest
generous	firm
	merit
faithful	grief
	glory
grateful	mercy
	praise
sympathy	advice



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vanity proud  
envy suspicion  
weak lazy  
deceit hide  
greed stingy  
flatter rebelled  
against flirt  
cruel boring  
flirt trick



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## >>> Moral exhortation

1 What we term virtue is often but a mass of various actions and divers interests, which fortune, or our own industry, manage to arrange; and it is not always from valour or from chastity that men are brave, and women chaste.

[ Who combats bravely is not therefore brave, He dreads a death-bed like the meanest slave; Who reasons wisely is not therefore wise, His pride in reasoning, not in acting, lies. Pope, Moral Essays, Ep. i. line 115.]

2 Self-love is the greatest of flatterers.

3 Whatever discoveries have been made in the region of self-love, there remain many unexplored territories there.

[This is the first hint of the system the author tries to develop. He wishes to find in vice a motive for all our actions, but this does not suffice him; he is obliged to call other passions to the help of his system and to confound pride, vanity, interest and egotism with self love. This confusion destroys the unity of his principle.]

4 Self love is more cunning than the most cunning man in the world.

5The duration of our passions is no more dependant upon us than the duration of our life.

[Then what becomes of flee will?]

6Passion often renders the most clever man a fool, and even sometimes renders the most foolish man clever.

7Great and striking actions which dazzle the eyes are represented by politicians as the effect of great designs, instead of which they are commonly caused by the temper and the passions. Thus the war between Augustus and Anthony, which is set down to the ambition they entertained of making themselves masters of the world, was probably but an effect of jealousy.

8The passions are the only advocates which always persuade. They are a natural art, the rules of which are infallible; and the simplest man with passion will be more persuasive than the most eloquent without.

[See Maxim 249 which is an illustration of this.]

9The passions possess a certain injustice and self interest which makes it dangerous to follow them, and in reality we should distrust them even when they appear most trustworthy.

10In the human heart there is a perpetual generation

of passions; so that the ruin of one is almost always the foundation of another.

11 Passions often produce their contraries: avarice sometimes leads to prodigality, and prodigality to avarice; we are often obstinate through weakness and daring through timidity.

12 Whatever care we take to conceal our passions under the appearances of piety and honour, they are always to be seen through these veils.

[The 1st edition, 1665, preserves the image perhaps better— “however we may conceal our passions under the veil, etc., there is always some place where they peep out.”]

13 Our self love endures more impatiently the condemnation of our tastes than of our opinions.

14 Men are not only prone to forget benefits and injuries; they even hate those who have obliged them, and cease to hate those who have injured them. The necessity of revenging an injury or of recompensing a benefit seems a slavery to which they are unwilling to submit.

15 The clemency of Princes is often but policy to win the affections of the people.

["So many are the advantages which monarchs gain

by clemency, so greatly does it raise their fame and endear them to their subjects, that it is generally happy for them to have an opportunity of displaying it."—Montesquieu, *Esprit Des Lois*, Lib. VI., C. 21.]

16 This clemency of which they make a merit, arises oftentimes from vanity, sometimes from idleness, oftentimes from fear, and almost always from all three combined.

[La Rochefoucauld is content to paint the age in which he lived. Here the clemency spoken of is nothing more than an expression of the policy of Anne of Austria. Rochefoucauld had sacrificed all to her; even the favour of Cardinal Richelieu, but when she became regent she bestowed her favours upon those she hated; her friends were forgotten. The reader will hereby see that the age in which the writer lived best interprets his maxims.]

17 The moderation of those who are happy arises from the calm which good fortune bestows upon their temper.

18 Moderation is caused by the fear of exciting the envy and contempt which those merit who are intoxicated with their good fortune; it is a vain display of our strength of mind, and in short the moderation of men at their greatest height is only a desire to appear greater than their fortune.

19 We have all sufficient strength to support the

misfortunes of others.

20 The constancy of the wise is only the talent of concealing the agitation of their hearts.

[Thus wisdom is only hypocrisy, says a commentator. This definition of constancy is a result of maxim 18.]

21 Those who are condemned to death affect sometimes a constancy and contempt for death which is only the fear of facing it; so that one may say that this constancy and contempt are to their mind what the bandage is to their eyes.

[See this thought elaborated in maxim 504.]

22 Philosophy triumphs easily over past evils and future evils; but present evils triumph over it.

23 Few people know death, we only endure it, usually from determination, and even from stupidity and custom; and most men only die because they know not how to prevent dying.

24 When great men permit themselves to be east down by the continuance of misfortune, they show us that they were only sustained by ambition, and not by their mind; so that PLUS a great vanity, heroes are made like other men.

[Both these maxims have been rewritten and made conciser by the author; the variations are not worth quoting.]

25 We need greater virtues to sustain good than evil fortune.

["prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity do th best discover virtue."—Lord Bacon, Essays, (1625), "Of Adversity".]

26 Neither the sun nor death can be looked at without winking.

27 People are often vain of their passions, even of the worst, but envy is a passion so timid and shame-faced that no one ever dare avow her.

28 Jealousy is in a manner just and reasonable, as it tends to preserve a good which belongs, or which we believe belongs to us, on the other hand envy is a fury which cannot endure the happiness of others.

29 The evil that we do does not attract to us so much persecution and hatred as our good qualities.

30 We have more strength than will; and it is often merely for an excuse we say things are impossible.

31 If we had no faults we should not take so much pleasure in noting those of others.

32 Jealousy lives upon doubt; and comes to an end or



becomes a fury as soon as it passes from doubt to certainty.

33 Pride indemnifies itself and loses nothing even when it casts away vanity.

[See maxim 450, where the author states, what we take from our other faults we add to our pride.]

34 If we had no pride we should not complain of that of others.

["The proud are ever most provoked by pride."—Cowper, Conversation 160.]

35 Pride is much the same in all men, the only difference is the method and manner of showing it.

["Pride bestowed on all a common friend."—Pope, Essay On Man, Ep. ii., line 273.]

36 It would seem that nature, which has so wisely ordered the organs of our body for our happiness, has also given us pride to spare us the mortification of knowing our imperfections.

37 Pride has a larger part than goodness in our remonstrances with those who commit faults, and we reprove them not so much to correct as to persuade them that we ourselves are free from faults.

38 We promise according to our hopes; we perform according to our fears.

[“The reason why the Cardinal (Mazarin) deferred so long to grant the favours he had promised, was because he was persuaded that hope was much more capable of keeping men to their duty than gratitude.”—Racine, *Fragments Historiques*.]

39 Interest speaks all sorts of tongues and plays all sorts of characters; even that of disinterestedness.

40 Interest blinds some and makes some see.

41 Those who apply themselves too closely to little things often become incapable of great things.

42 We have not enough strength to follow all our reason.

43 A man often believes himself leader when he is led; as his mind endeavours to reach one goal, his heart insensibly drags him towards another.

44 Strength and weakness of mind are mis-named; they are really only the good or happy arrangement of our bodily organs.

45 The caprice of our temper is even more whimsical than that of Fortune.

46 The attachment or indifference which philosophers have shown to life is only the style of their self love, about which we can no more dispute than of that of the palate or of the choice of colours.

47 Our temper sets a price upon every gift that we receive from fortune.

48 Happiness is in the taste, and not in the things themselves; we are happy from possessing what we like, not from possessing what others like.

49 We are never so happy or so unhappy as we suppose.

50 Those who think they have merit persuade themselves that they are honoured by being unhappy, in order to persuade others and themselves that they are worthy to be the butt of fortune.

[“Ambition has been so strong as to make very miserable men take comfort that they were supreme in misery; and certain it is, that where we cannot distinguish ourselves by something excellent, we begin to take a complacency in some singular infirmities, follies, or defects of one kind or other.” —Burke, *On The Sublime And Beautiful*, (1756), Part I, Sect. XVII.]

51 Nothing should so much diminish the satisfaction which we feel with ourselves as seeing that we disapprove at one time of that which we approve of at another.

52 Whatever difference there appears in our fortunes, there is nevertheless a certain compensation of good and evil which renders them equal.

53 Whatever great advantages nature may give, it is not she alone, but fortune also that makes the hero.

54 The contempt of riches in philosophers was only a hidden desire to avenge their merit upon the injustice of fortune, by despising the very goods of which fortune had deprived them; it was a secret to guard themselves against the degradation of poverty, it was a back way by which to arrive at that distinction which they could not gain by riches.

[“It is always easy as well as agreeable for the inferior ranks of mankind to claim merit from the contempt of that pomp and pleasure which fortune has placed beyond their reach. The virtue of the primitive Christians, like that of the first Romans, was very frequently guarded by poverty and ignorance.”—Gibbon, *Decline And Fall*, Chap. 15.]

55 The hate of favourites is only a love of favour. The envy of NOT possessing it, consoles and softens its regrets by the contempt it evinces for those who possess it, and we

refuse them our homage, not being able to detract from them what attracts that of the rest of the world.

56 To establish ourselves in the world we do everything to appear as if we were established.

57 Although men flatter themselves with their great actions, they are not so often the result of a great design as of chance.

58 It would seem that our actions have lucky or unlucky stars to which they owe a great part of the blame or praise which is given them.

59 There are no accidents so unfortunate from which skilful men will not draw some advantage, nor so fortunate that foolish men will not turn them to their hurt.

60 Fortune turns all things to the advantage of those on whom she smiles.

61 The happiness or unhappiness of men depends no less upon their dispositions than their fortunes.

["Still to ourselves in every place consigned our own felicity we make or find."——Goldsmith, Traveller, 431.]

62 Sincerity is an openness of heart; we find it in

very few people; what we usually see is only an artful dissimulation to win the confidence of others.

63The aversion to lying is often a hidden ambition to render our words credible and weighty, and to attach a religious aspect to our conversation.

64Truth does not do as much good in the world, as its counterfeits do evil.

65There is no praise we have not lavished upon Prudence; and yet she cannot assure to us the most trifling event.

[The author corrected this maxim several times, in 1665 it is No. 75; 1666, No. 66; 1671-5, No. 65; in the last edition it stands as at present. In the first he quotes Juvenal, Sat. X., line 315. "Nullum numen habes si sit Prudentia, nos te; Nos facimus, Fortuna, deam, coeloque locamus." Applying to Prudence what Juvenal does to Fortune, and with much greater force.]

66A clever man ought to so regulate his interests that each will fall in due order. Our greediness so often troubles us, making us run after so many things at the same time, that while we too eagerly look after the least we miss the greatest.

67What grace is to the body good sense is to the mind.

68It is difficult to define love; all we can say is, that in the soul it is a desire to rule, in the mind it is a sympathy, and in the body it is a hidden and delicate wish to possess what we love—plus many mysteries.

[“Love is the love of one singularly, with desire to be singularly beloved.”—Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (1651), Part I, Chapter VI.]

69If there is a pure love, exempt from the mixture of our other passions, it is that which is concealed at the bottom of the heart and of which even ourselves are ignorant.

70There is no disguise which can long hide love where it exists, nor feign it where it does not.

71There are few people who would not be ashamed of being beloved when they love no longer.

72If we judge of love by the majority of its results it rather resembles hatred than friendship.

73We may find women who have never indulged in an intrigue, but it is rare to find those who have intrigued but once.

[“Yet there are some, they say, who have had None; But

those who have, ne'er end with only one." —Lord Byron, Don Juan, Canto iii., stanza 4.]

74 There is only one sort of love, but there are a thousand different copies.

75 Neither love nor fire can subsist without perpetual motion; both cease to live so soon as they cease to hope, or to fear.

[So Lord Byron {Stanzas, (1819), stanza 3} says of Love— "Like chiefs of faction, His life is action."]

76 There is real love just as there are real ghosts; every person speaks of it, few persons have seen it.

["Oh Love! no habitant of earth thou art— An unseen seraph, we believe in thee— A faith whose martyrs are the broken heart,—But never yet hath seen, nor e'er shall see The naked eye, thy form as it should be." —Lord Byron, Childe Harold, Canto iv., stanza 121.]

77 Love lends its name to an infinite number of engagements (Commerces) which are attributed to it, but with which it has no more concern than the Doge has with all that is done in Venice.

78 The love of justice is simply in the majority of men the fear of suffering injustice.



79 Silence is the best resolve for him who distrusts himself.

80 What renders us so changeable in our friendship is, that it is difficult to know the qualities of the soul, but easy to know those of the mind.

81 We can love nothing but what agrees with us, and we can only follow our taste or our pleasure when we prefer our friends to ourselves; nevertheless it is only by that preference that friendship can be true and perfect.

82 Reconciliation with our enemies is but a desire to better our condition, a weariness of war, the fear of some unlucky accident.

[“Thus terminated that famous war of the Fronde. The Duke de la Rochefoucauld desired peace because of his dangerous wounds and ruined castles, which had made him dread even worse events. On the other side the Queen, who had shown herself so ungrateful to her too ambitious friends, did not cease to feel the bitterness of their resentment. ‘I wish,’ said she, ‘it were always night, because daylight shows me so many who have betrayed me.’”—Memoires De Madame De Motteville, Tom. IV., p. 60.

Another proof that although these maxims are in some cases of universal application, they were based entirely on the experience of the age in which the author lived.]