

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI (1469-1527)

2 Millennia later: from 400 BCE to 1500 CE

- The **Stoics**: Epictetus and the *Enchiridion*
 - The Great Chain of Being
- St. Augustine, *City of God*
 - Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*
 - Free will and determinism
 - On the perfectibility of society
 - Fusing pagan ethics and Christianity
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*
 - The rise of the Renaissance and **secular humanism**

Why do we say that Machiavelli is, along with Hobbes, the founder of modern political theory?

- The importance of historical precedent (n.b. - what era does he use to support most of his arguments?)
 - What does it mean to say that Machiavelli “raided history” (to quote Donald Kagan)
- Is Machiavelli delinking politics from religion? from ethics? Or is he rejecting Christianity in favor of a pagan ethos?
 - Or is it the case that “this is not a division of politics from ethics. It is the uncovering of the possibility of more than one system of values, with no criterion common to the system whereby a rational choice can be made between them...[In other words, that] there might be a conceptual..and not merely a material, obstacle to the notion of the single ultimate solution” (from a *New York Review of Books* article by Isaiah Berlin)

Why has Machiavelli been interpreted so many different ways by so many different people?

- Like many figures we study, it is very important to study Machiavelli’s works in the context of his life and times
 - The lessons of Cesare Borgia, Savonarola, and Medici power politics
- It is also important to realize that, in many respects, it may not matter at all what Machiavelli himself thought: the important thing is to understand his theory and its permutations—this is the beauty of reading a classic **text**!

The Prince, VIII: Of those who by their crimes come to be Princes: Agathocles the Sicilian and Oliverotto of Fermo

- “cruelty being well or ill employed...the usurper should make haste to inflict what injuries he must” (9)
- If Machiavelli is indeed ‘raiding history’ to prove a predetermined point, can you think of any counterexamples?

IX: Of the civil Princedom: On the relative merits of being made prince by the nobles and by the people

- How does Machiavelli say the Prince should control ‘fair-weather friends’? (bottom of 11)

XIV: Of the duty of a Prince in respect of military affairs: Why is it important for a Prince to be both physically and mentally “constantly engaged in the chase”? (12)

XV: Of the qualities in respect of which men, and most of all Princes, are praised or blamed

- “It seems to me better to follow the real truth of things than an imaginary view of them” (13)

XVI: Of liberality and miserliness: “Liberality without the reputation of it is hurtful” (14)

- Why does Machiavelli say that miserliness is a justifiable—even necessary—vice? (15)
- “Of what does not belong to you or to your subjects you should... be a lavish giver as were Cyrus, Caesar, and Alexander; for to be liberal with the property of others does not take from your reputation...What injures you is to give away what is your own...while you practice [liberality], you lose the means whereby it can be practiced” (15)

XVII: Of cruelty and clemency, and whether it is better to be loved or feared: Cesare Borgia, Hannibal, and Scipio

- “It is better to be loved rather than feared...but it is safer to be feared than loved...[as long as one is not hated, for] above all, he must abstain from the property of others”

XVIII: How Princes should keep faith: The case of Achilles, and the lion and the fox

- “There are two ways of contending, one in accordance with the laws, the other by force”

XXV: What fortune can effect in human affairs, and how she may be withstood: on the legacy of Christian determinism

- The analogy of the flooded bank (19) as applied to 15th century Italy
- “he will prosper most whose mode of acting best adapts itself to the character of the times”