

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought

Lecture Outline: Machiavelli, *The Prince* (chapters 1-15)

- Dates: 1469 Birth
1498 Confirmed as second chancellor to the Florentine republic
1512 Spanish troops attack and Florence surrenders
Machiavelli convicted and punished for involvement in anti-Medici conspiracy
1513 Wrote *The Prince*
1515-19 Wrote *Discourses on Livy*
1527 Death

I. Background

- A. Personal
 - 1. Political career in Florentine republic (1498-1513)
 - 2. Torture by Medicis, effort to get position in new Medici regime
 - 3. Involvement in circle of republicans
- B. Context of the Renaissance
 - 1. Ancient Rome as the model
 - 2. Liberty as collective self-government
- C. Puzzles
 - 1. Relationship between *The Prince* and *Discourses*
 - 2. Is there a conception of morality at work in Machiavelli's political thought?

II. Machiavelli as the first modern thinker

- A. Rejection of traditional Christian conception of virtue
- B. Mirror for princes literature
 - 1. Advice manuals for rulers: win over Fortuna with classical Roman virtues
 - a. The good man is the political man
 - b. Honor, modesty, and mercy make a great prince
 - 2. Machiavelli shows the contradictions of this literature
 - a. Significance of sheer power in political life
 - b. Successful prince has to cultivate different virtues
- C. Machiavellian virtue: *virtù*
 - 1. Not any particular moral virtue
 - 2. A skill or capacity for flexibility, ability to adapt oneself to the times and to fortune

III. Ways of establishing principalities

- A. Leaders who acquire power solely through *virtù*
- B. Leaders who rely in part on fortune
 - 1. Don't rely on the good will of others
 - 2. Control your own arms
 - 3. Cesare Borgia as example of *virtù*
- C. Leaders who acquire power through wickedness
 - 1. Agathocles the Sicilian
 - 2. *Virtù* cannot be equated with viciousness

IV. Importance of military art/good arms