

Reading for next week

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

Machiavelli, who lived at a time of great political upheaval in Italy and in his native Florence, is most famous for his handbook *The Prince* (1513), composed in exile shortly after his imprisonment and torture by the Medici, the princely rulers of formerly republican Florence to whom he dedicated the work. After nearly five centuries, debate continues to rage over whether *The Prince* is a deeply amoral or even immoral work (you may have heard “Machiavellian” used as a derogatory adjective), showing princes (i.e., monarchs) how to do whatever it takes to consolidate their power, or an anti-monarchic work that covertly advances the ideas of another of his great works, the republican *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy* (1513-21)

“Letter to Francesco Vettori,” December 10, 1513 (in Norton Anthology)

*The Prince* (1513)

Chapters 6, 7, 8 (photocopy handout)

Chapters 15-18, 25, 26 (in Norton Anthology)

Some questions to consider as you read

What is Machiavelli’s conception of human nature?

Is *The Prince* a “handbook for tyrants”? Do we learn anything about his attitude to republics?

What is the difference between Oliverotto and Agathocles, on the one hand, and Cesare Borgia, on the other? What are implications of the comparison?

What is the role of fortune in human affairs? Do Machiavelli think that we have free will?

What is the role of religion in the book?