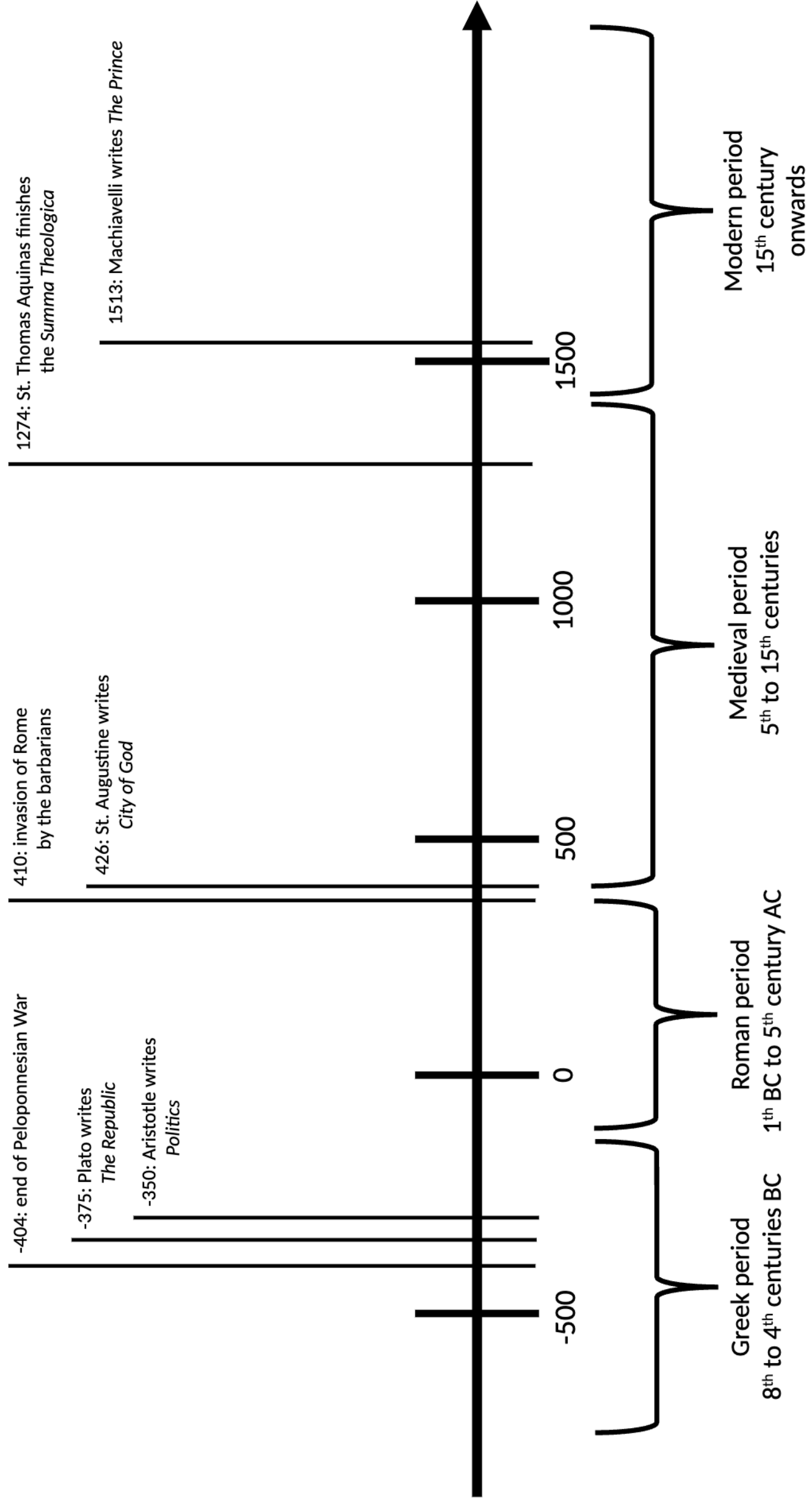




Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)

- Italian diplomat in Florence
- Lives in a time where the regions of Italy were separated and always in conflicts
 - Italy was not yet a unified country



- He had a successful career for a time and he met the major rulers of his epoch
- His fortune changed when there was a regime change in Florence and he was forced to retire from political life

- Machiavelli is often seen as one of “the first moderns” of political thought and one of the fathers of political science
- Plato and Aristotle did talk about politics, the problem of social conflict, the classification and degeneration of regimes...
 - But Machiavelli tries to think politics as it is and not as it should be
- In one sense, the modern scientific method is an approach (1) based on empirical observations and where (2) no facts and theories are accepted on authority alone (e.g. religion and tradition)
 - The modern scientific approach emerges around the 15th and 16th centuries
 - Machiavelli is one of first thinkers that applies a scientific outlook to politics. He removes moral and religious values from his observations about politics.

- To be sure: Machiavelli was a diplomat and not a political philosopher, and the *Prince* is not a theoretical treatise. But this work had an enormous influence and would be commented by many of the major political thinkers.
- Machiavelli has two major works, the *Prince* and the *Discourses*
 - In the *Discourses*, he doesn't hide his sympathy for a republic, i.e. a government where the people is involved
- The *Prince* is a small work that he wrote to the new ruler of Florence, Lorenzo de Medici, to garner his favors and maybe get back into politics
- The *Prince* is a "mirrors for princes," i.e., an old genre of book where an experienced person advises a young ruler on how to govern and the rules of behavior they should follow
 - However, typical mirrors for princes advise the rulers to respect the Christian virtues and seek the common good. The *Prince* is not a normal mirror for princes in this regard.
 - Machiavelli's "scientific" approach to politics is clearer in the *Prince*

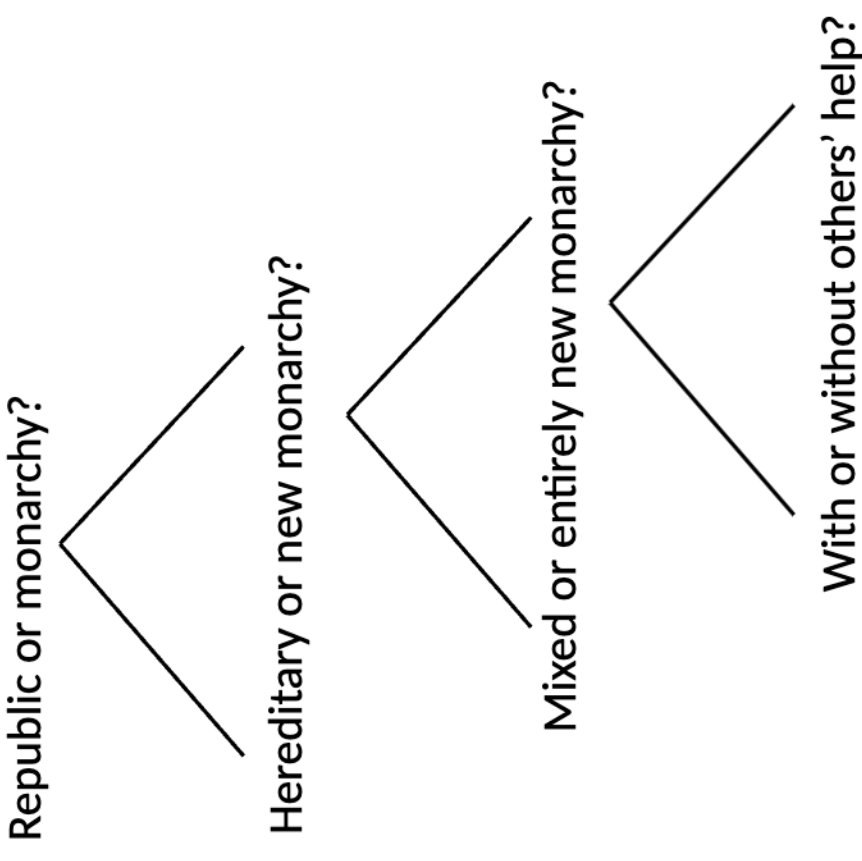
- First, let's look at the first pages of the readings in order to get a sense of Machiavelli's general approach to politics
- Then, we'll move ahead in the book and analyze the central passages of the *Prince* where he describes some of his ideas and criticizes Greek and Christian political thought

- First, there's a small introduction where Machiavelli offers his experience and advice to Lorenzo de Medici
- Then, he makes a classification of political regimes
 - There are republics and monarchies (sometimes translated as "principalities")
 - By "republic," Machiavelli meant something broad: forms of government that have at least some citizens' participation (including oligarchy/aristocracy, and democracy/"popular government")
- Oddly, he never talks about tyranny in the *Prince* but he does in the *Discourses*

- Then, he says that there are:

- Two types of monarchies: recent monarchies or monarchies that have been ruled by the same dynasty for a long time (pp. 1-2)
- If we're talking about a new monarchy, is it mixed or completely new? By "mixed" he means: did you annex the monarchy to your own realm? (pp. 2-5)

- Finally, if we're talking about an entirely new monarchy: was the monarchy created with or without someone else's help? (pp. 7-14)



- How did Aristotle classified political regimes? How does Machiavelli differs from him?
 - Aristotle classified regimes according to their number and to whether they were directed toward the common good
- Instead, Machiavelli classifies regimes according to how they are acquired and how they should be maintained
 - Monarchies that have been ruled for a long time are inherited and are the easiest to maintain
 - However, annexed monarchies must be conquered and are more difficult to maintain
 - Indeed, occupying a new territory requires injuring a lot of the established interests that exist in the territory that is being conquered
 - The ruler is creating potential enemies that will become problems later on

- What does Machiavelli suggest the ruler should do to preserve a newly annexed monarchy?
 - (1) extinguish the lineage of the previous rulers and (2) the ruler should leave the laws and customs intact, and not injure anyone any longer (pp. 2-3)
- Here we have one of the first “Machiavellian” moments of the *Prince*: Machiavelli casually proposes to kill an entire lineage of rulers
- But is Machiavelli someone that craves violence for violence’s sake? What’s the point of the suggestion he just made?
 - Machiavelli is interested in how the ruler should acquire and preserve power
 - Machiavelli looks at politics like a game of chess: if the point of politics is to preserve power, then what should the ruler do to attain that objective?

- Machiavelli suggests that the ruler should do immoral things to achieve power. But what are examples of “positive,” “nice” things that he also suggests?
 - Machiavelli also talks about how a ruler should live among his subjects to help gain legitimacy (pp. 3-4), or how the ruler should empower weaker rulers to help him in time of needs (p. 4-5)
- What is the difference between a “the ends justify the means” approach and Machiavelli’s approach?
 - Machiavelli doesn’t think that the ends justify the means. He says: there’s a specific end, which is acquiring and preserving power, and then one should use appropriate means to achieve this specific end.
- While Aristotle and Aquinas looked at politics with an eye to virtue, morality, and the promotion of the common good, Machiavelli looks at it “scientifically”: how to achieve the goal of acquiring and preserving power?

- What are some implications of this scientific view of politics? There's a great example in the last paragraph of page 5
- Machiavelli praises the Romans and how they preemptively attacked neighboring realms that were growing too strong
 - “war is not to be avoided, and can be deferred only to the advantage of the other side” (p. 5)
- What do you think someone like Aquinas would have said if a ruler preemptively decided to attack another ruler?
 - This advice is at odds with Christian morals. Aquinas says that a [just war](#) must have (1) a just cause (rectifying a wrong) and (2) a good intention (the ruler must have the intention of promoting the good)
- In a Machiavellian paradigm, preemptive wars are actually good things: it's a sound mean to preserve the power of the ruler
 - If a neighboring country is growing too strong and might become a problem in the future, the stronger country has legitimacy to attack the weakest one

- Did you see what he suggests in page 6? Why is this page revealing of the tensions between the *Prince* and the *Discourses*?
 - “(...) when cities or provinces have been accustomed to live under a prince (...) they are slower to take arms, and a prince can win them over with greater facility and establish himself securely. But in republics there is greater life, greater hatred, and more desire for vengeance; they do not and cannot cast aside the memory of their ancient liberty, so that the surest way is either to lay them waste or reside in them.”
 - “whoever becomes the ruler of a free city and does not destroy it, can expect to be destroyed by it”
- Although we know that Machiavelli was a big supporter of republics (we see this clearly in the *Discourses*), his scientific outlook leads him to the conclusion that free cities are much more dangerous for a prince that wants to retain power

- Let's now look at some of the crucial parts of the *Prince*, page 19, "Of the Things for Which Men, and Especially Princes, Are Praised or Blamed"
 - After giving many tips on how to preserve power in concrete instances (e.g. preserving newly conquered monarchies), Machiavelli says that he will talk about the subject of how to manage one's friends and subjects

“I know that many have written of this, I fear that my writing about it may be deemed presumptuous, differing as I do (...) from the opinions of others. But my intention being to write something of use to those who understand, it appears to me more proper to go to the real truth of the matter than to its imagination; and many have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality; for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case.” pp. 19-20

- On the one hand, there's a clear rejection of those who "imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality"
 - He references, not only Plato, but all the previous tradition of thinkers who defined politics in light of ideals that were extremely difficult to attain: the ideal republic of Plato, the ideal regimes of Aristotle...
- But why is he rejecting that tradition? What's his problem with it?
 - "A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good."
 - It's not true that following virtue and morality leads to happiness. On the contrary, following moral rules too consistently leads to ruin and unhappiness.

- What, then, is his solution to achieve happiness?

- Rulers should only follow established conceptions of morality depending on whether it will help them to preserve their state
- “[the ruler] should be prudent enough to avoid the scandal of those vices which would lose him the state, and guard himself if possible against those which will not lose it him, but if not able to, he can indulge them with less scruple.” (p. 20)
- Is he suggesting that rulers should just become extremely immoral, start wars, and plunder one another? How can this be a recipe for happiness?

- On the contrary, he is saying that rulers need to be cautious and not start conflicts in the name of impossible ideals
- They should limit themselves to conquer what they can, preserve power, and foresee eventual troubles. For him, that’s a surest way to happiness than what the premoderns suggested.
- As we will see, Machiavelli is very critical of ruthless and overambitious rulers