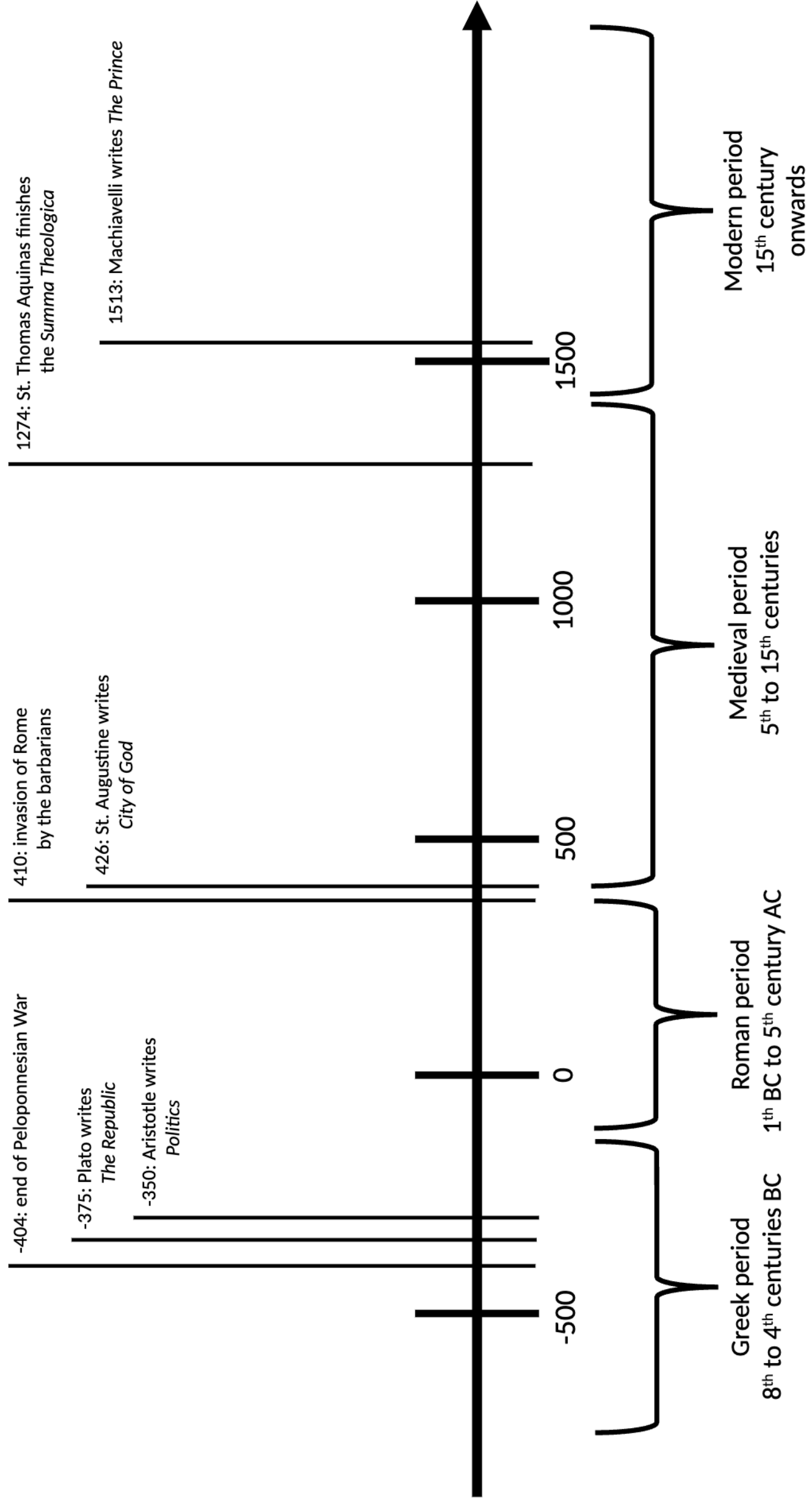




- Machiavelli is very amoral, which is jarring. But he really sets the tone of much of modern thought.
- There's a shift where political thinkers start removing moral and religious considerations from their conception of politics
 - "We now know that politicians are selfish. In that case, let's create a system where the Congress and the Presidency put one another in check."
 - "Discussing which is the one, true religion leads to endless conflicts. Let's have religious toleration instead."
 - "There are countless conceptions of happiness. But we can all agree that most people want peace and freedom. Let's establish individual rights to property and freedom of expression."
- Modern thinkers are not amoral, far from it! What is most important about Machiavelli is this down-to-earth, empirical outlook that modern thinkers inherit.
 - He lowers the ambitions of ancient politics and focuses on practical gains now, today, on this earth

- That's why Machiavelli is often seen as one of "the first moderns" of political thought
 - He initiates this way of looking at politics as it is and as it actually works. He removes moral and theological considerations from his observations.
- For instance, we saw that he classified regimes, not according to the number of rulers and whether they were ruled for the common good (Aristotle), but according to how they are acquired and how hard it is to maintain them
 - Inherited monarchies are the easiest. However, annexing a monarchy to one's realm is more difficult. Then, creating a new monarchy from whole cloth is extremely hard.
- Then, when talking about how to annex a monarchy, we saw that he casually suggests that killing the lineage of the former monarchs is an effective way to annex a monarchy
 - But we also saw that he doesn't want violence for violence's sake (living in the new monarchy can work too)
 - Machiavelli feels cold and rational in the way he thinks: if the goal is acquiring and maintaining power, then what's the most efficient way to reach that goal?

In p. 19, he says that he will now give tips on how to manage friends and subjects. Then he says:

“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 philosopher-king 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."
 - He suggests that following virtue and morality is not a recipe for happiness. On the contrary, following moral rules rigidly leads to ruin and unhappiness.
 - When looking at politics, we must assume that people are selfish, not that they aim at virtue

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

- Rulers should only follow established conceptions of morality to the extent that it helps 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 successful politics than what the premoderns suggested.
- Machiavelli is very critical of ruthless and overambitious rulers (see pp. 15-16)

- Throughout the *Prince*, Machiavelli subverts a lot of traditional concepts and ideas, and he translates them into his own pragmatic, results-oriented philosophy
- In this class, we look at a few examples by analyzing key passages

- In p. 20, after listing a few of the virtues and vices, he says:

“I know that every one will admit that it would be highly praiseworthy in a prince to possess all the above-named qualities that are reputed good, but as they cannot all be possessed or observed, human conditions not permitting of it, it is necessary that he 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. And yet he must not mind incurring the scandal of those vices, without which it would be difficult to save the state, for if one considers well, it will be found that some things which seem virtues would, if followed, lead to one’s ruin, and some others which appear vices result in one’s greater security and wellbeing.”

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- For instance, in the sentence: “he should be prudent enough to avoid the scandal of those vices which would lose him the state”
- He plays with the meaning of “prudent.” What is a prudent ruler for Machiavelli?
 - For Aristotle, prudent persons are moral persons: they are always honest, generous, and just in exactly the right proportion and in light of the context. The goal is acquiring virtues.
 - For Machiavelli, prudent rulers know when not to be moral: they deviate from morality in the right amount in light of the context. The goal is conquering and preserving power.
- He plays with the meaning of “vices”: sometimes he means it in its traditional sense but, in this sentence, he means it in his own sense
 - He calls “vices” anything that will lead the ruler to lose the state (in this context: being too inflexible in pursuing the traditional virtues)

- The way he subverts the notion of “virtue” is clear in “Of Cruelty and Clemency, and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved or Feared” (pp. 21-22)
- Which does he side with? Should the ruler be loved or feared?
- The traditional response is that it is better to be loved, but Machiavelli subverts this idea and says that fear is safer
 - People love rulers as long as they are benefited by them
 - When rulers no longer benefit the people (e.g. crisis), revolts begin
 - However, fear makes the people think twice before revolting

- Thinkers traditionally said that being feared led to hatred, and Machiavelli agrees that one should avoid hatred. For instance, a ruler should avoid plundering, being cruel, and needlessly injuring others.
- However, he says that sometimes being cruel pays-off:
- “But when the prince is with his army and has a large number of soldiers under his control, then it is extremely necessary that he should not mind being thought cruel (...) Hannibal (...) had an enormous army, composed of men of all nations [and] there never arose any dissension either among them or against the prince (...). This could not be due to anything but his inhuman cruelty, which together with his infinite other virtues, made him always venerated and terrible in the sight of his soldiers, and without it his other virtues would not have sufficed to produce that effect.”

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- Let's look at one last way in which Machiavelli subverts the traditional notion of virtue
- The traditional thinkers have a point: it's really important to avoid becoming hated since it creates problems in the long run
- What is the tip that Machiavelli gives to avoid being hated?
 - The prince should seem virtuous but avoid being virtuous (pp. 23-24))
 - “for men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands, for every one can see, but very few have to feel”: on average, people judge the appearances more than what's real.
- How is this a subversion of Aristotle?
 - For Aristotle, being virtuous was the mean to achieve happiness
 - For Machiavelli, being virtuous in Aristotle's sense is dangerous as it can make one inflexible. Rather, one should be virtuous in his sense of being flexible, of seemingly having the Aristotelian virtues, and of not being good when necessary.