History 101

Macchiavelli

Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (3 May 1469 – 21 June 1527) was an Italian diplomat, politician, historian, philosopher, humanist, writer, playwright and poet of the Renaissance period. He has often been called the father of modern political science. For many years, he was a senior official in the Florentine Republic, with responsibilities in diplomatic and military affairs. He also wrote comedies, carnival songs, and poetry. His personal correspondence is renowned by Italian scholars. He was secretary to the Second Chancery of the Republic of Florence from 1498 to 1512, when the Medici were out of power. He wrote his most well-known work *The Prince* (Il Principe) in 1513, having been exiled from city affairs.

Machiavellianism is widely used as a negative term to characterize unscrupulous politicians of the sort Machiavelli described most famously in The Prince. Machiavelli described immoral behavior, such as dishonesty and the killing of innocents, as being normal and effective in politics. He even seemed to encourage it in some situations. The book gained notoriety due to claims that it teaches "evil recommendations to tyrants to help them maintain their power".

The term "Machiavellian" is often associated with political deceit, deviousness, and realpolitik. On the other hand, many commentators, such as Baruch Spinoza, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, have argued that Machiavelli was actually a republican, even when writing *The Prince*, and his writings were an inspiration to Enlightenment proponents of modern democratic political philosophy. In one place, for example, he noted his admiration for the selfless Roman dictator Cincinnatus.

Commentators such as Leo Strauss have gone so far as to name Machiavelli as the deliberate originator of modernity itself. Others have argued that Machiavelli is only a particularly interesting example of trends which were happening around him. In any case Machiavelli presented himself at various times as someone reminding Italians of the old virtues of the Romans and Greeks, and other times as someone promoting a completely new approach to politics.

Machiavelli's ideas had a profound impact on political leaders throughout the modern west, helped by the new technology of the printing press. During the first generations after Machiavelli, his main influence was in non-Republican governments.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Machiavelli]