This course focuses on Machiavelli’s political theory. Our goal is two-fold: we learn the art of close reading, to reveal and the complex and contradictory layers of meaning in a text, and we explore the practice of political theory by lingering over the central questions that Machiavelli raises. What is the nature of power? What is the character of “good” leadership? What is the relationship between morality and politics? How can human beings sustain forms of self-government, given their short-sightedness and fearfulness, the predatory conduct and narrow interest of ruling classes, and the tendency of institutions to become reified forms of elite rule? We focus on his two most important texts, and read several of his great interpreters.

Learning Goals:
* close reading of texts
* writing critical essays that use textual evidence to address themes
* speaking in collaborative and conversational ways about contested topics
* beginning to understand “politics” and the canon of political theory

Required Texts:
- The Prince and The Discourses, Modern Library edition
- xeroxed readings supplied by prof and posted on classes site

Course Requirements:
- attendance is mandatory: we meet only 7 times; unexcused absence count
- preparation for each class
- response paper (1 single spaced typed page) for each class
- one final 8-10 page paper about course texts
- one optional 5 page paper on a course text

Grading:
25% participation
25% response papers
50% final paper

* plagiarism —using content you do not attribute to its actual source— is punished by an F in the course. If you have ANY questions about what counts as plagiarism (i.e. what resources, passages, or work you should cite) please ask for clarification!

* Policy on electronics: I expect all cell-phones to be turned off and put out of sight and reach. Laptop use is not allowed unless the student has learning difficulties that require it.

* We will take a break half-way through class for 10 minutes.
Oct 22:  Introduction: defining “politics” and “political”  

Oct 29 Machiavelli I: Spatial and Temporal dimensions of Politics  
read:  * Niccolo Machiavelli, The Discourses  
   Machiavelli’s preface/introduction  
   Book One: preface, chaps 1-7/9-12/16-18/25-26/34-35/40/47/53/55/58  
   Book Two: preface/ chaps 2/10/19/24/29  
   Book Three: chaps 1-3/7-9/30-31/35/41-42  
write:  * For M, what characterizes a “republic” or makes a “free people”?  
   * explain M’s idea of “corruption” What criteria indicate it?  
   * Assess M’s idea that a republic can be “re-newed” by “re-turning to first principles.”

Nov 5:  Machiavelli II: Constitutions & Politics  
read:  * John McMcmorick, “Ferocious Populism” (x)  
   * James Madison, Federalist Paper #10 (x)  
   * Sheldon Wolin, “Norm and Form: Constitutionalizing Democracy”(x)  
   * Abraham Lincoln, “Lyceum Address”(x)  
   * Frederick Douglass, “...the Meaning of July 4th to the Negro?”(x)  
write:  * How do constitutions protect &/or endanger democratic politics?  
   * Do elections hold elites accountable? must “the people” use other means of representation? Is protest productive? Enough?  
   * Is Madison’s politics “corrupt” by Machiavelli’s criteria?  
   * Compare Lincoln’s appeal to constitutional “origins” (1787) vs Douglass/Wolin appealing to revolution as origin (1776)  
   * How does the issue of slavery/race change your reading of Mach?

Nov 12: Machiavelli III: Contingency, context, and political action  
read:  *Machiavelli, The Prince  
   *Mary Dietz, “Trapping the Prince” (x)  
write:  * Why is “Fortuna” the goddess of politics?  
   * What kind of character do humans need if the world is ruled by Fortuna, not God? (What character does each authority affirm?)  
   * When political actors understand “the reality of appearances,” and take account of how they are perceived, is that being corrupt or acting responsibly?  
   * If “the prince” is a metaphor for politics, what does it mean?
Nov 19: Machiavelli IV:
#5 Violence, states of exception, & morality in politics
read: *Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” (x)
      *Hannah Arendt, “Reflections On Violence” (x)
write: *Assess Arendt’s distinction between violence and power
      *Analyze violence: is it always wicked, but sometimes necessary —when? Is it always wicked AND impractical/counter-productive?

Dec 3 Machiavelli V:
#6 Politics as theater: appearances, performance, & rhetoric
read: * Mary Deitz, “Speaking in half-truths”
      * Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Notes on Machiavelli”
write:

Dec 10 Theorizing what is distinctive about politics/the political
#7
      * Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”

Final paper due Monday Dec 14 by noon
I have given you, O Adam, no fixed abode, and no visage of your own, nor any special gift, in order that whatever place or aspect or talents you yourself will have desired, you may have and possess them wholly in accord with your desire and your own decision. Other species are confined to a prescribed nature, under laws of my making. No limits have been imposed you however; you determine your nature by your own free will, in the hands of which I have placed you. I have placed you at the world's very center, that you may better behold from this point whatever is in the world. And I have made you neither celestial nor terrestrial, neither mortal nor immortal, so that, like a free and able sculptor and painter of yourself, you may mold yourself wholly in the form of your choice. ----Pico della Mirandolla

"Although martial severity, self-discipline and danger have been the conspicuous characteristics of my life, its primary prerequisite and basis has been freedom, a necessity completely irreconcilable with any kind of commitment to a grossly factual situation. Accordingly, if I lived like a soldier it would have been a silly misapprehension to believe that I should therefore have lived as a soldier; yes, if it is permissible to describe and define intellectually an emotional treasure as noble as freedom, then it may be said that live like a soldier but not as a soldier, figuratively but not literally, to be allowed in short to live symbolically, spells true freedom."

-Thomas Mann

"I have become useless to myself, to my relatives and to my friends because such as been the decision of my sad fate. And I can say nothing better than that there has been left me no other good than health for myself and my family. I continue to wait in order to be in time to take good fortune when she comes, and if she does not come, to have patience."

"On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the days clothing covered dust and mud, and put on garments regal and courtly, and reclothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death. entirely I give myself over to them."

"I believe...as Boccaccio said, that it is better to act and repent than not to act and repent." ----Machiavelli

"I love my city more than my soul." ---Machiavelli
Study Questions: Machiavelli, The Discourses
- He claims to create a “new route.” What is it???
- He claims to recover the example of the roman republic - why?
- He celebrates the founders of religions and states. Why?
- Romulus killed Remus: if the act accuses, the result excuses - what redeems fratricide? What redeems founding violence?
- He says republics require a religious framework of faith. Why?
- How is a founding law or constitution, and a founding faith, the BASIS of liberty? Does freedom require a framework of law and belief? Why? Or do founders (“founding fathers”) create an edifice that IMPRISONS their children, the second and third generations? How can they exercise their freedom?
- What is corruption? Machiavelli uses the word all the time, but what does he mean? When is a republic “corrupt?” What has happened to the citizens? Does it denote a moral condition? psychological? Political?
- The way to address “corruption,” he argues, is a “return to first principles” by which citizens also “return to themselves.” How does he mean “return?”

- Use his account of founding, first principles, corruption and renewal to theorize American politics.

*    *    *   *

Study Questions, Machiavelli, The Prince:
- There seems to be a profound contradiction between the Prince and the Discourses - the Discourses celebrates Roman virtue, the Prince counsels fraud and force. But are they so different? What is the relationship? Are BOTH teaching important lessons about politics?

- What is Machiavelli’s purpose in The Prince? (Is it to instruct princes -or to warn the people?) What does he mean by describing himself as a landscape painter who sees both heights and valleys? (Where are we?)
- does it confirm or change your view of what politics is or must be?
- what does he teach about generating and keeping power?
- Why must a Prince “learn to be bad?” What does he mean? What does he teach about force (the lion) and fraud (the fox)? Are deception and violence necessary in politics? When? Why? How does fighting “like a man” (by law) relate to fighting like a beast, by force and fraud? Is there a purpose that “redeems” the evil he does? Could fighting like beasts be necessary to establish or protect the laws that enable people to fight like men? Or, are both ways of fighting always necessary?
- He says “I love my city more than my soul.” He loves his city MORE -not rather than- his soul. Does this claim illuminate his text?

- What does it mean that the prince is oriented by Fortuna and not (only?) God? Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics?

- Imagine the prince as a leader - a Moses, Pericles, or Lincoln, Bobby Kennedy, Clinton, Nelson Mandela, Bush: does your view of the text change depending? Was Martin Luther King a prince?
- Imagine “princes” having to work with, use and change the relationship of
“the nobles” and “the people” (of elites and the rest of us) -then...

-Rousseau says Machiavelli wrote the prince for (to warn) the people, and, he says peoples know princes best (just as princes know people best.) What should we people, then, conclude about “princes”?

Context for thinking about Machiavelli

1. Remember the time he wrote as a time of such violence and chaos - and what might be justified in THAT context, when such violence makes ANY means seem justified if it creates stability and security.

2. Imagine that he seeks, most of all, to create ANY stable structure, BUT also, ideally, a republic. Actions that seem necessary to FOUND a republic are NOT necessary in a healthy republic, except in moments of crisis. (War, as with Lincoln and southern secession, say, but there remains the issue of deception.) He addresses limit conditions and “states of exception” - times of founding and crisis, more than he addresses “normal” or “healthy” politics.

4. He really believes that single great leaders are necessary for great changes in the world, but as a republican, he also is deeply ambivalent about such leaders. That is why the longest chapter in the prince is the chapter on conspiracy. The founder of the new republic will have to be killed by republican plotters unless he creates republican institutions and steps aside.

5. There is moral ambiguity in Machiavelli, therefore: princes may need to do evil things for good ends, and the people, also, may need to use violence to gain their liberty.

6. Imagine that Machiavelli is trying to teach us ABOUT politics - especially about aspects of politics we find ugly or abhorrent - AND imagine that his lessons are warped by his machismo, which was rife in Florentine culture.

What is Machiavelli trying to teach about politics?

I. The landscape of power.

You are situated in a landscape of power - princes, people, and nobles. Assume inequality of power between elites and people, also assume that different princes try to organize the people in different ways - Nixon v McGovern in 72 Jesse Jackson v Mondale in 84, or Kerry v Bush. Imagine the state as the SITE and object of such conflicts - who controls it, uses it, FOR whom. Do the nobles use the state to exploit the people, or do the people use the state to defend themselves against the nobles. Imagine that “the nobles” and “the people” are themselves divided, not a unit automatically, but a political creation, created and sustained by ideas and leaders. No one is OUTSIDE the landscape of power.

What is the landscape of power in the U.S. now?
Where & WHO are YOU? WHO are you WITH?

Compare Machiavelli’s landscape - princes, nobles, people - with other models
Marx (bourgeois class, petit-bourgeois class, & proletariat class)
II. The theatre of appearances:

How you appear to others is a material fact, a material force; how you appear -what you say and do, also your manner- is a powerful reality. To be a responsible (or a good) actor, you must reckon on the consequences of how you appear; you are responsible not only for your intentions, but for the effects on others of what you say and do. (I am aware of this as a parent and teacher -I try to act with the impact of my appearance in mind: how I appear is often different than how I feel, and in teaching especially, I will say what I do NOT believe for the sake of helping a discussion. I perform because I enact a role; there is a difference between my public face and my private reality.) What makes a “good” or a “bad” performance? This is not a moral distinction, but a distinction referring to what Machiavelli calls Virtù, which means not virtue, but virtuosity. If I reckon on the consequences of my appearance, then I shape them to have the effect I seek -is this to “manipulate” appearances or/and to take responsibility for the effects of my actions? To shape one’s appearances - is this corruption &/or responsibility?

We are inclined to condemn this awareness of the reality of appearances, we are inclined to say - this is immoral, because there is a gap between who you “really” are and how you act or appear or what you say. But this gap needs to be looked at, and our moral judgments of “actors” needs to be judged, too. Do you imagine that -in the realm of intimate relations- we are supposed to be completely transparent with our friends, lovers, family? But are you wholly transparent or honest with a friend or lover? Are there things you hold back or hide? Little deceptions? Why? -to avoid unnecessary hurt to them? To protect yourself? Because they will not understand what you wish to tell them, not yet at least, maybe later? Have you ever engaged in the act of seduction? Does the other know he or she is being seduced? Why do it? Even in intimate relations, then, there is a “gap” between your inside and your appearance, a degree of artifice or performances? Is the issue how to be a “good” parent, teacher, leader, citizen, lover? Does good mean moral goodness, the same at every instant? Does it mean always being “true” to oneself, whatever that means? Or does it mean virtuosity at a task or role?

In politics, when people are often adversaries and there is not a lot of trust, deception may be even more present and necessary. Deception not in a “corrupt” sense, but in the everyday ordinary sense of seducing another, of not saying everything, of withholding some things for the sake of other things which are more important. But there are kinds of withholding and degrees of deception, no? Think of (a) civility, which depends on not expressing how you feel, but showing politeness instead, especially with adversaries; (b) politicians “hiding” their sex life; (c) politicians seeking support from constituents by downplaying certain of their positions. Or, if you are an atheist in a religious country, should you proclaim it or soft-pedal it? Is it worth being marginalized? (d) Nixon hiding the fact that he was subverting the democratic process (-although these deceptions were so compounded that they could not last).

When are political relationships enabled by ordinary degrees of civility and when are they corrupted by systematic lying? When is deception a crime threatening the republic, and when a necessary part of politics? When are we being moralistic about “lying,” and scapegoating “politicians” for degrees of deception we know in our own lives? What should we make of our
wish for complete transparency and authenticity at all times? Is this a wish for purity that is nowhere possible—and often destructive—in life? I am trying to suggest the difference between using political and moral criteria to judge political action. Can we attack political corruption without being moralistic about life?!

But, still again, if we become the passive (duped) audience of a prince—then politics has become “theatricalized.” What is the script? Who writes it? Who are the actors? Can the script be changed?

Machiavelli teaches about the reality of appearances, how much appearances matter, and, he also exposes the spectacle by which leaders deceive the people. How to distinguish these? What follows from recognizing the inescapable power of appearances? What is the difference between “corruption” and “good theater” or a “good performance”? (A performance that (a) shows its seams, its artifice? (b) that empowers and inspires people, who begin as an audience but become actors in their own lives, authors of their own destiny? It is a performance that can do this!!!)

III. Fighting like Beasts and Men
The goal is establishing a framework in which people can “fight like men,” which means “by law”—that is, within a constitutional framework, even as that framework itself can be changed (as it was in Rome.) Force and fraud may be necessary to establish that framework, but are not prevalent once it is established, if the polity is healthy. Think of Mandela and the ANC in South Africa, whose political struggle to (re)found a non-racial state involved lion and fox but enabled another kind of politics afterwards. Still, there remains an inescapable element of the “beastly” even in a healthy polity—as when the people riot to gain redress of grievances, or conspire to deceive their enemies. When is force or fraud necessary—and who decides?

IV. Moralism and Fortuna
Americans are moralistic, we make absolute distinctions between good and evil. We do not like moral ambiguity, we think in terms of black and white in more senses than one. Machiavelli appears immoral or amoral to us because he sees that good can come from evil deeds, and that evil can come from good intentions. He does not believe that good intentions are all that count in life, and he believes we are responsible for consequences that follow from our speech and action. The terrifying thing is that, since Fortuna governs the world, we cannot guarantee that good will come from our good intentions. We may say God is on our side, and then we assume that we are the side of goodness, and never face the truth, which is that any time we act we are at moral risk, because evil may come from what we do, despite our best intentions. To take responsibility for our own complicity in evil, whether by intention or not, is to gain moral maturity. We tend to think that you are either innocent (good) or corrupt, but for Machiavelli, moral maturity requires getting over innocence, seeing innocence (our need for innocence) as itself immoral.
Choose ONE question/identify it on your paper/double-space/due by 3pm Mar.3

1. “Of all men who have been eulogized, those deserve it most who have been the authors and founders of religion; next come such as have established republics or kingdoms.” Why/how is this idea of “the founder” so crucial to Machiavelli? Is it a myth? A wish (if only there were such people, then ...)? A metaphor for what we all-too-human folks can do? Does he manipulate the myth or is he its captive?

2. “There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things.” Discuss Machiavelli’s idea of innovation: why is it so difficult? And yet, why does he talk so much of founding, renewal and “return to first principles”?

3. “I conclude then that fortune varying and men remaining fixed in their ways, they are successful so long as these ways conform to circumstances, but when they are opposed [to circumstances] they are unsuccessful.” Discuss the concept of Fortuna: Why is Fortuna the goddess of politics? How is a universe ruled by god, or by Fortuna, different? To live in relation to Fortuna is to develop what kind of character? How does it matter that Fortuna is a woman?

4. Machiavelli portrays a shifting, kaleidoscopic world in which nothing is fixed or certain, no one can be trusted, and things are not what they seem. Appearance is more effectual than reality, and deceit is the best weapon.” Discuss change, appearance, and deceit (and their counterparts, stability, reality, and trust) in the world he portrays. How then does he understand political knowledge?

5. For Machiavelli, politics occurs in a theater of appearances, performance and persuasion. Leaders mold appearances (their words, manner, and deeds) to gain allegiance and inspire action because political power depends on belief and loyalty. But what criteria distinguish good and bad performances, between good and bad leaders? What do his theatrical metaphors teach about politics?

6. “Because power is inescapable in life, the question is how to generate it and for what ends to exercise it. For Machiavelli, in fact, power is lasting only if it is legitimate.” Discuss Machiavelli’s view of power.

7. Machiavelli says to a prospective prince: “it is better to be feared than loved,” but he also says: “a prince’s fortress is the love of his people.” He endorses deceptive appearances but says princes must bring real benefits. Do coercion or fraud suffice to create/sustain a leader’s power?

8. Machiavelli’s figuration of political corruption as effeminacy, his macho persona and willingness to embrace violence, his idealization of male/paternal leadership, his difficulty in imagining mutuality, and his picture of Fortuna, show the impact of gender codes, and his own sense of proper (and endangered) masculinity. Use gender to assess his theory.

9. Contrast freedom conceived as moral choice of right or wrong in relation to god's law, as creative action in relation to Fortuna, or as collective
action within the rules of a game or republic.

10. Explore The Prince not as a primer for princes, but as a vision of crucial aspects of political life, indeed, as a poetic metaphor of political freedom.

11. Develop Machiavelli’s view of “corruption” and “renewal.” What is corruption? How are corrupt polities renewed? Does his argument illuminate politics in the American republic? (Is American politics “corrupt” in a Machiavellian sense? What might Machiavellian forms of renewal look like?)

12. Analyze Machiavelli’s contrast between fighting like beasts (the lion and fox, force and fraud) and fighting like men (by laws.) What is the difference? But also, is there a relationship?

13. “Machiavelli’s writings are merely a manual for a political opportunist. He has no conception of the social purpose of politics, and no system of values: he cannot answer the question, for what end should political power be used? He is a Thrasymanchus, merely a technician.” -A.nonymous

“Machiavelli presents a vision of political virtue to contrast with the incompetence and unnecessary cruelty of the political actors of his day. His vision is meant to inspire and guide some “armed prophet” to bring peace and justice to a time of corruption and violent chaos.”-B.nonymous

Assess the purpose of Machiavelli’s political theory

14. “For Machiavelli, political responsibility requires learning how not to be good. He thus says “I love my city more than my soul.” His is a moral though not a Christian view of life and politics.” -A.nonymous

“To claim ends justify means is misguided because means are always ends in the making: force and fraud NEVER create order or value.” -B.nonymous

Assess how Machiavelli relates morality & politics (Does he endorse politics without morality? Show how political responsibility involves a different kind of morality? Does political responsibility require dealing with violence/moral exceptions or is he confuse means & ends?)

15. Merleau-Ponty says “politics is a relationship to men, not principles”—What IS the role of ideals in Mach’s view of power, conflict, and leadership?

16. Analyze Weber on tragedy and politics. Include his idea of two ethics (of ultimate ends and of responsibility) and his image of “the demon of politics.”

17. Assess Arendt’s argument that political theorists confuse violence and power: why is she so anxious to distinguish them? Is her distinction credible? (Does Mach teach this distinction? Do the problems in his theory
18. Arendt claims that, of all theorists, only Machiavelli understands the “space of appearances” that constitutes the world of politics. Use her essay on freedom or her chapter on action to assess Machiavelli’s view of politics.

16. Plato depicts people trapped in a cave of appearances and illusions because they have no access to knowledge of the reality (forms) behind appearances. Justice and order require rulers who are philosophers with this knowledge. How does Machiavelli theorize justice, knowledge, and power in contrast to Plato? Does he offer a contrasting view of political knowledge? Does he show how people can create justice and order out of the flux of appearances and conflict of doxa characterizing life in the cave?