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The Prince as an Enigma: Unraveling Machiavelli's Intentions

Abstract:

Niccolo Machiavelli and his body of work have been a subject of fascination for scholars for centuries. 'Machiavellian' has entered common parlance, and most people have at least a vague impression of the writer: one defined by unscrupulous cunning and a willingness to do anything to achieve a political goal. This conception however, is rooted in the reading of one text: *The Prince*. While it is not the longest or most in depth of his political works, *The Prince* dwarfs all of Machiavelli's other work in both popular and academic recognition. However, even scholars who see *The Prince* as most similar to his other work still acknowledge the presence of numerous marked differences between it and almost everything else Machiavelli wrote, even on the same subjects. This paper will be examining some of the most prominent explanations for the discrepancy and what parts of them work, what parts don't, what each of them ignores, and possible ulterior motivations for each explanation.