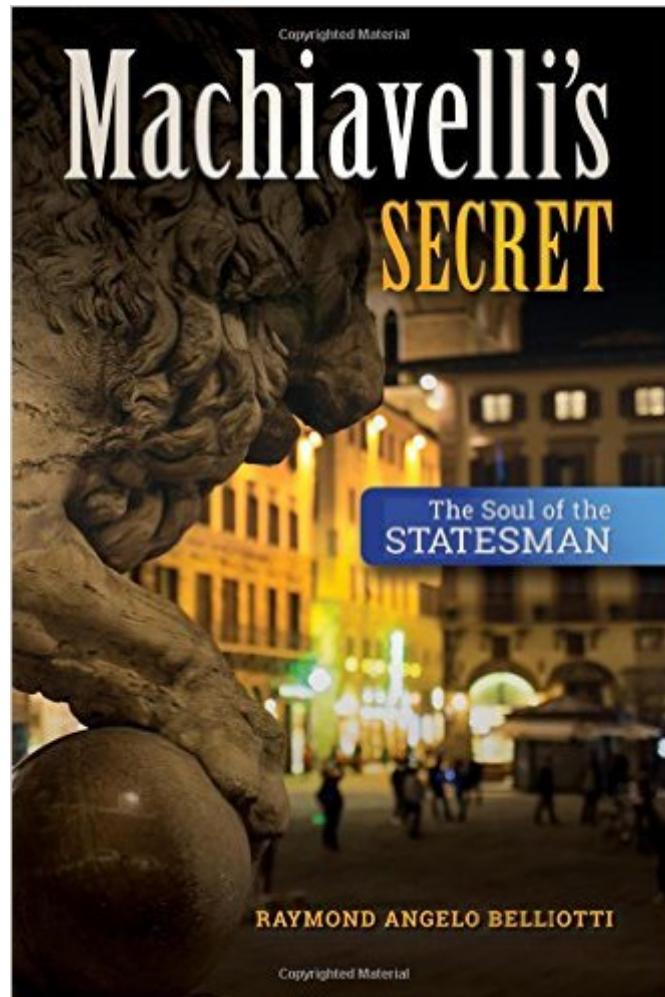


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Machiavelli's Secret: The Soul Of The Statesman



Synopsis

Uncovers clues regarding the inner life of Machiavelli's political leaders. The political statesman, Machiavelli tells us, must love his country more than his own soul. Political leaders must often transgress clear moral principles, using means that are typically wrong, even horrifying. What sort of inner life does a leader who causes evil well experience and endure? The conventional view held by most scholars is that a Machiavellian statesman lacks any inwardness because Machiavelli did not delve into the state of mind one might find in a politician with dirty hands. While such a leader would bask in his glory, the argument goes, we can only wonder at the condition of the soul they have presumably risked in discharging their duties. In *Machiavelli's Secret*, Raymond Angelo Belliotti uncovers a range of clues in Machiavelli's writings that, when pieced together, reveal that the Machiavellian hero most certainly has inwardness and is surely deeply affected by the evil means he must sometimes employ. Belliotti not only reveals the nature of this internal condition, but also provides a springboard for the possibility of Machiavelli's ideal statesman. A valuable contribution to contemporary Machiavelli scholarship.

CHOICE Belliotti identifies an important cluster of philosophical problems, including the extent to which statesman should bend the moral rules for the collective good and what implications such decisions might have for the statesman. Moreover, using Machiavelli to tie together this discussion both illustrates the timeless quality of the problem and provides a fresh way of thinking about the problem. The book nicely demonstrates the ways that contemporary philosophers can benefit from knowing more about history and also how historians can make use of contemporary discussions.

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Customer Reviews

Of the many the books I have read on Machiavelli, Raymond Angelo Belliotti's *Machiavelli's Secret: The Soul of a Statesman* (2015) is by far the most faithful and dependable reading of what he actually wrote. Belliotti's book is not revisionist in the sense of re-interpreting Machiavelli. Rather, his book is a corrective look at the meaning and intent of Machiavelli's work in contrast to all the flawed popular and academic notions of his writings. For example, Belliotti unassailably shows that: 1) Machiavelli never wrote "the ends justifies the means"; 2) never favored politics over morality except in infrequent, necessary situations; 3) advocated for absolutist ethics over consequentialist ethics, and disparaged those who judge deeds only by their results instead of their principles; and 4) never argued that pagan morality should be exclusively used in politics while Christian conventional morality should be relegated only to private life. What Machiavelli actually wrote was that one "cannot, under cover of good, do evil" (Discourses, I-page 46). However, Belliotti does not try and gloss over Machiavelli's political philosophy. Belliotti sets the record straight that Machiavelli wrote something worse than "the ends justify the means" when he wrote that the end makes the means honorable and that moral men believe this. But he wrote that this is so only because the masses judge actions based on their favorable outcomes based merely on external appearances. And Belliotti points out that Machiavelli still advocated harsh, cruel measures to achieve the most highly desirable goals. Belliotti blames not only all the pop books on evil "Machiavellianism" but on the academic works of such scholars as Leo Strauss, Harvey Mansfield, Isaiah Berlin, John McCormick and others. Which raises a question that Belliotti did not raise: were these scholars Machiavellian in their twisting of Machiavelli's writings? Belliotti even refutes Erica Benner's notion that Machiavelli was a serial trickster who wrote esoterically and satirically. Instead he lays out for everyone to see what has always been in plain sight. 1. Statesmen must embrace conventional morality (Christianity) as their default position and therefore accept the absoluteness of numerous imperatives. 2. They must learn both how not to be good and how to use evil well, but only on those occasions when there is necessity to do so or an emergency that threatens the existence of the state or conventional morality. Evil well-used is reserved for founding a nation or religions, expelling foreigners to protect the state, reforming corruption, and removing obstreperous elements as a last resort. Evil well-used is typically proportionate, quick, and furthers the common good. Conversely evil ill-used is disproportionate,

recurrent, politicized, and pretends to further the common good. Power obtained through inhumanity and evil ill-used cannot reap glory (The Prince, p. 8; The Discourses, I-p. 10). The entire theme of The Prince is to reject tyranny in favor of a republic of representative government where power is shared. Belliotti's modern examples of evil well-used are Winston Churchill's decision not to evacuate a town during WWII that was to be bombed by the Germans in order to hide the fact that the British had broken German military codes; Pres. Harry Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on two cities in Japan to end the Pacific War; and Pres. Ronald Reagan's Iran-Contra affair where arms were exchanged for hostages. Although not cited by Belliotti, Machiavelli would likely have approved of Evangelical Christian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's attempt to assassinate Adolph Hitler as another example of evil well-used.³ In such difficult situations, politicians and military leaders must get their hands dirty, but that does not excuse or justify evil. Evil ill-used is gratuitous cruelty. And no matter whether evil is well-used or ill-used, its use unavoidably results in leaders losing their souls. Machiavelli's secret is that even leaders who must use evil for greater ends have a secret inner life that can never be revealed as it would disclose leaders as weak, effeminate, and unable to use the threat of power in lieu of actual violent measures to further the common good. Belliotti's book bogs down in his chapter on "The Problem of Dirty Hands" when he uses obscure academic language like "deontological ethics" (rule based ethics as opposed to consequentialist ethics). But the rest of the book is written very clearly and is copiously documented. I cannot recommend this book high enough. Run to and buy it.

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