



Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power (Frank M. Covey, Jr., Loyola Lectures in Political Analysis)

Roger D. Masters

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In recent years, Niccolo Machiavelli's works have been viewed primarily with historical interest as analyses of the tactics used by immoral political officials. The author in this text, argues that Machiavelli should be reconsidered as a major philosopher whose thought makes the wisdom of antiquity accessible to the modern (and post-modern) condition, and whose understanding of human nature is superior to that of such moderns as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx or Mill. Central to this claim is the author's discovery that Machiavelli knew and worked with Leonardo da Vinci between 1502-1507. After introducing historical evidence of the circumstances in which da Vinci and Machiavelli probably met, the author reinterprets "The Prince" in the light of what came to be modern science. He presents an account of Machiavelli's teaching as a scientific approach to human nature and politics. In this reading, the "lion, fox, and wolves" symbolise principles studied in contemporary biology, whereas the "dikes and dams" controlling the river of "fortune" describe Machiavelli's experience of diverting the Arno river, apparently aided by Leonardo's expertise, in hopes of winning a war with Pisa. Masters relates Machiavelli's views to the history of centralised governments, to models in rational choice or game theory, and to neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory. This approach shows how Machiavelli's view of leadership clarifies the role of television in industrialised societies and the profound transformations in contemporary politics.

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