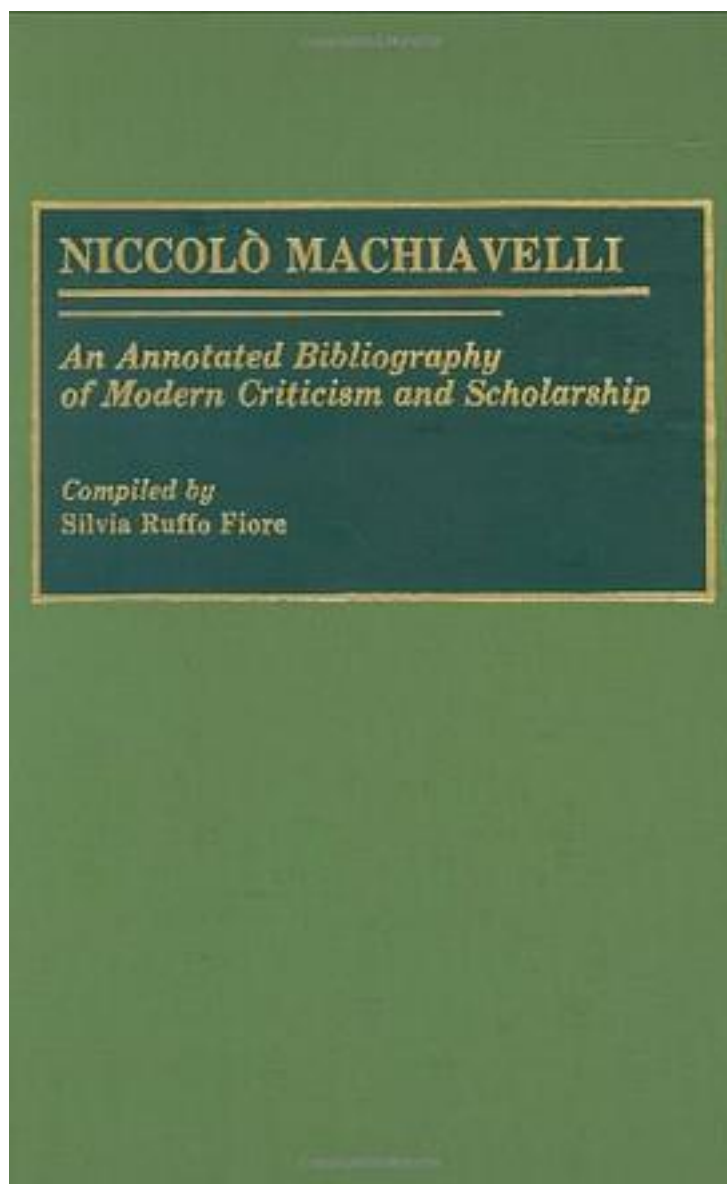


Niccolo Machiavelli



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出版者:

出版时间: 2008-12

装帧:

isbn: 9780739130629

Machiavelli is usually understood as a thinker who separated morality from politics or who championed Roman, pagan morality over conventional, Christian morality. Belliotti argues, instead, that Machiavelli's innovation is his understanding of the perhaps irresolvable moral conflicts that exist within political leaders who fulfill the duties of their offices while accepting the authority of absolute moral principles. Machiavelli is a moral pessimist who insists that politicians must 'risk their souls' when performing their public responsibilities. Politicians and military leaders must dirty their hands in service to their constituents. This is especially the case when one strong man founds a state or reforms a corrupt state. History washes away—that is, excuses—many of the horrifying deeds that are required in such cases. Belliotti does not try to domesticate Machiavelli by picturing him as a liberal humanist inclined only toward free government. Nor does he paint him as a teacher of evil. Instead, the book offers a balanced understanding of the Florentine, with special focus on his insights and his myopias. Machiavelli's view of human nature and his conclusion that international affairs have always been and will always be a series of zero-sum contests lead him to stunning discoveries and glaring errors alike.

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