

# interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

September 1985    Volume 13 Number 3

- 297    David Lowenthal    Leo Strauss's *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*  
321    Jan H. Blits    Socratic Teaching and Justice: Plato's *Clitophon*  
335    Kit R. Christensen    Individuation and Commonality in Feuerbach's  
"Philosophy of Man"  
359    Allan D. Nelson    John Stuart Mill: the Reformer Reformed  
403    Michael P. Zuckert    Appropriation and Understanding in the History of  
Political Philosophy: on Quentin Skinner's Method

## *Book Reviews*

- 425    J. E. Parsons, Jr.    *Locke's Education for Liberty* by Nathan Tarcov  
429    Charles Butterworth    *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confession: a Reply  
to St. Augustine* by Ann Hartle  
432    Nicholas Capaldi    *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*  
by Donald W. Livingston  
434    Francis Canavan    *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke* edited and with an  
introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.  
435    Dennis Teti    *American Conservatism and the American Founding*  
by Harry V. Jaffa

# interpretation

Volume 13 number 3

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Charles E. Butterworth • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz • Howard B. White (d.1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula • Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d.1973) • Kenneth W. Thompson

Associate Editors Fred Baumann • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo • Derek Cross • Edward J. Erler • Maureen Feder-Marcus • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela K. Jensen • Will Morrisey • Charles Rubin • Leslie Rubin • John A. Wettergreen • Bradford Wilson • Catherine Zuckert • Michael Zuckert

Assistant Editors Marianne C. Grey • Laurette G. Hupman

Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Annual  
subscription rates individual \$13; institutional \$16; student (3-year limit) \$7. INTERPRETATION appears three times a year.

Address  
for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies of their work.

Copyright 1985 • Interpretation

Nevertheless, despite the Kantian argument, I hold that something like true education is possible, but not to be assumed as likely. When we hear commencement speakers wax eloquent over “the dynamics of education” or “the educational process” we should either conclude that they think they know what they do not or that they are wolves in sheep’s clothing. Perhaps this reminder may serve to measure more than anything else the distance between Locke’s *Education* and our educational practices—a fact which, by implication, does not escape Professor Tarcov.

**The Modern Self in Rousseau’s Confession: A Reply to St. Augustine.** By Ann Hartle. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. xiii + 186 pp.: \$19.95.)

CHARLES E. BUTTERWORTH  
*University of Maryland*

Ann Hartle’s thoughtful analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* seeks to demonstrate that it must be read less as an autobiography than as “a philosophical work of art” (p. 12). In pursuing such a goal, Hartle explicitly refuses to approach this work from a psychological point of view, that is, to presume that she is more aware than Rousseau of what he was trying to do with the *Confessions*. Her argument is grounded rather on detailed knowledge of the *Confessions*, clear understanding of Rousseau’s other writings, and provocative insights into the work of his predecessors, especially St. Augustine and Plutarch. She views Rousseau’s *Confessions* as a response to St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and an attempt to contrast his own life with St. Augustine’s as Plutarch contrasted those of illustrious Greeks and Romans in his *Parallel Lives*. Rousseau’s goal, argues Hartle, is to depict the soul of modern man as molded by the creative imagination and thus as independent of divine intervention. Intelligent and captivating as this interpretation is, I think it places too much emphasis on the *Confessions* and succeeds only by isolating that work from the *Dialogues* and, above all, from the *Reveries*.

Hartle considers the unquestioned premise for modern man’s thinking about himself to be reliance on an irreducible inner self which captures his essence. She wishes to question that premise, to look into its origins and to determine what it stands in opposition to. Contending that Rousseau develops the idea of the inner self in the *Confessions* to define man’s nature, she explores the idea of the inner self and the character of the *Confessions* in a series of overlapping and thus frequently repetitive analyses. The first of her five chapters advances a series of reasons for understanding the *Confessions* as a philosophical work, chief among them being Rousseau’s explicit insistence that it offers the only true portrait of human nature. For Hartle, then, the *Confessions* is neither apologetic nor

justificatory, but a quest for human nature, and Rousseau's depiction of himself presents us with the only genuine instance of it. She explains factual discrepancies in the narrative as willful errors designed to alert the discerning reader and interprets Rousseau's explicit admissions that not all the details are accurate or complete as indications that the work is fictitious and therefore to be read as something other than a life history. Above all, she draws attention to a series of formal parallels between Rousseau's *Confessions* and the book of the same title written by St. Augustine, then notes that the two works are nonetheless quite opposite in content.

In the second chapter Hartle observes that because the author dies before he can relate the whole of his life, any autobiography is necessarily incomplete and explores how Rousseau sought to overcome this limitation in the *Confessions*. She also investigates Rousseau's *Letter to M. de Voltaire* in order to show that he rejects personal divine providence in favor of an impersonal natural providence. Though she stops short of an explicit pronouncement, her argument points to Rousseau's probable denial of belief in God. Death for Rousseau seems to be little more than the death of passion, a state similar to that of reverie—a state in which one can recollect the past without expecting anything from the future. In Chapter Three, Hartle investigates how Rousseau seeks to transcend time or at least to be steadfast in the face of its changes. Here, too, the importance of reverie comes to the fore: Whereas most men are so concerned with the opinion of others and thus so anxious about the future that they never enjoy the present, he delights in it insofar as it allows him to recall past joys without worrying about or anticipating the future. Rousseau thus assumes a God-like stance: He reveals his soul as God would see it, perceives things as does God, and is as unperturbed by the events of the world as God (see Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, Pléiade ed., vol. 1, pp. 5, 388, and 999).

Hartle devotes her fourth chapter to showing that Rousseau's denial of ultimate union with God obliges him to insist upon grasping the self as a whole, something he achieves via the creative imagination. She nonetheless notes the careful restrictions Rousseau places on the imagination's creativeness: He will not let it reach the point of madness, although he sometimes seems to come very close. In the final chapter, Hartle tries to show how Rousseau's denial of divine providence and insistence on creative imagination bring him to his concept of modern man's self. His movement away from the world and towards solitude allows him to discern the uniquely human characteristic, the sentiment of existence, and thus to view man's nature as subsumed in the feeling of self. Consequently, Hartle concludes by insisting on the private and asocial character of Rousseau's portrait of man, on his denial of the immortality of the soul, on his tacit recognition that there is no way back to the state of nature, and on the fact that man's present truncated existence must always be in conflict with his true nature.

Ann Hartle's conclusions about Rousseau's teaching differ little from my own, but we do not read the *Confessions* in the same manner. She denies its autobiographical character because, given its factual discrepancies and problematic omissions, she wishes to avoid trying to understand Rousseau better than he understood himself. And I agree with that concern. But she then overcompensates and views it as a clever piece of fiction designed to hide from all but the most assiduous reader its ultimate secrets, such as Rousseau's teaching about providence. Hartle consequently pays no attention to the surface of the *Confessions* and dwells instead on randomly culled phrases which point to other works without revealing anything about this one.

I understand the *Confessions* to be a special instance of what it pretends to be, that is, an autobiography, but one having all the limitations or special features noted by Rousseau and therefore needing to be interpreted in terms of these features and limitations. It contains hints and background information about ideas developed in other works as well as an explanation of his uniqueness as a man of natural sentiments. A proper interpretation of the *Confessions* must pay attention to its parts, to the surface of the work, and to the way arguments are presented therein. Rather than wonder about how the *Confessions* can be complete as a self-portrait, though incomplete as a chronicle of Rousseau's life, I emphasize his identification of the *Reveries* as both an appendix and a sequel to the *Confessions* and of the *Dialogues* as an attempt to enlighten the coming generation about his true character (see *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, pp. 998–1000). Hartle's desire to save Rousseau from the appearance of folly, surely commendable, leads her to dismiss his often stated fear that his contemporaries were plotting against him. Unreasonable, even far-fetched as it seems, this claim of Rousseau's must be faced if we are to arrive at a proper appreciation of the whole of his teaching. Perhaps because I place such emphasis on the *Confessions*, the *Reveries*, and the *Dialogues* as autobiographical works in which Rousseau attempts to tell us something about himself, I find it necessary to reject Hartle's assertion—and it is indeed only that—that his self-portrait is really a portrait of modern man (see p. 126). For me, Rousseau is never modern man. He alone among the men of his generation, and on this he stakes his claim, has been able to fathom the difficulties posed by modernity and to think or feel his way back to a happier mode of existence.

This difference in emphasis and interpretation notwithstanding, I find Hartle's book most instructive. It is extremely thoughtful and quite well written. Only because she has argued so clearly and so carefully is it possible for me to formulate so precisely my own divergent opinions.

On the whole, her translations are quite good, though somewhat stilted. In only two instances do I think that she has erred: on page 42 the French "y," referring to "the sinful bodies," should be rendered as "in them" rather than as "there" (" . . . contract more corruption there . . ."); and on page 150 she should have

translated the initial “aussi” as “thus” or “therefore” rather than as “also” (“Also, here below . . .”). In addition, if the phrase “the mind looks forward to things, it looks at things, and it looks back on things” on p. 81 is meant as a translation of St. Augustine’s “animo . . . nam et expectat et attendit et meminit,” I find it extraordinarily free. Finally, there are far too many repetitions of quotations as well as changes with respect to the way those same passages are quoted (see pp. 19 and 39; 23 and 139; 61 and 82; and 33–34, 95, 103, and 115).

**Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life.** By Donald W. Livingston. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. xiv + 371 pp.: cloth, \$30.00.)

NICHOLAS CAPALDI

*Queens College*

Livingston’s work reflects and heralds a significant development in Hume scholarship. It is in part a distillation of the current revolution, which views Hume as a positive thinker, not just a negative one, and as more than just an epistemologist who followed Locke and presaged positivism. Hume is viewed from a fresh perspective, and his work is treated as a coherent whole. What Livingston contributes to this revolution is an examination of Hume’s philosophical and historical writings, which is mutually illuminating. The emphasis should be on the ‘mutual’ and, if anything, on the fundamental significance of historical narrative to human thought. Unlike even recent good work, that traces the continuity between the epistemology and Hume’s social and political positions, Livingston reveals how the epistemology is itself better understood from an historical perspective. The result is a picture of Hume as a serious “historicist” philosopher and the originator of a secular philosophical conservatism.

The title of Livingston’s volume, “Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life,” indicates the central role of common life (a judicious improvement over ‘common sense’ and an expression actually used by Hume). Common life is the sum total of past cultural practices that have emerged unplanned and unintended into a framework in terms of which we both interpret the world and make practical decisions. As such, common life contains implicit norms, and the job of the philosopher is to explicate such theoretical and practical norms. In addition, philosophers have the therapeutic function of pointing out when thought, including philosophy, violates the framework of common life.

According to Livingston, true philosophy for Hume “presupposes the authority of common life” (p. 3) which thereby gains a kind of transcendental status. False philosophy, on the other hand, comes about when we try to make common life an object of critical reflection. The attempt to do so is an attempt to turn phi-