

# Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2019

Volume 45 Issue 2

- 155 Ian Dagg Natural Religion in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Laws*
- 179 David N. Levy Aristotle's "Reply" to Machiavelli on Morality
- 199 Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo "Deceived by the Glory of Caesar": Humility and Machiavelli's Founder
- 223 Marco Andreacchio **Reviews Essays:**  
*Mastery of Nature*, edited by Svetozar Y. Minkov and Bernhardt L. Trout
- 249 Alex Priou *The Eccentric Core*, edited by Ronna Burger and Patrick Goodin
- 269 David Lewis Schaefer *The Banality of Heidegger* by Jean-Luc Nancy
- 291 Victor Bruno **Book Reviews:**  
*The Techne of Giving* by Timothy C. Campbell
- 297 Jonathan Culp *Orwell Your Orwell* by David Ramsay Steele
- 303 Fred Erdman *Becoming Socrates* by Alex Priou
- 307 David Fott *Roman Political Thought* by Jed W. Atkins
- 313 Steven H. Frankel *The Idol of Our Age* by Daniel J. Mahoney
- 323 Michael Harding *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thrasymachean-Dionysian Socrates* by Angel Jaramillo Torres
- 335 Marjorie Jeffrey *Aristocratic Souls in Democratic Times*, edited by Richard Avramenko and Ethan Alexander-Davey
- 341 Peter Minowitz *The Bleak Political Implications of Socratic Religion* by Shadia B. Drury
- 347 Charles T. Rubin *Mary Shelley and the Rights of the Child* by Eileen Hunt Botting
- 353 Thomas Schneider *From Oligarchy to Republicanism* by Forrest A. Nabors
- 357 Stephen Sims *The Legitimacy of the Human* by Rémi Brague

# Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- Editor-in-Chief* Timothy W. Burns, Baylor University
- General Editors* Charles E. Butterworth • Timothy W. Burns
- General Editors (Late)* Howard B. White (d. 1974) • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987)  
Seth G. Benardete (d. 2001) • Leonard Grey (d. 2009) •  
Hilail Gildin (d. 2015)
- Consulting Editors* Christopher Bruell • David Lowenthal • Harvey C.  
Mansfield • Thomas L. Pangle • Ellis Sandoz • Kenneth  
W. Thompson
- Consulting Editors (Late)* Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) •  
Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • John Hallowell (d. 1992)  
• Ernest L. Fortin (d. 2002) • Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) •  
Joseph Cropsey (d. 2012) • Harry V. Jaffa (d. 2015)
- International Editors* Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
- Editors* Peter Ahrens Dorf • Wayne Ambler • Marco Andreacchio •  
Maurice Auerbach • Robert Bartlett • Fred Baumann • Eric  
Buzzetti • Susan Collins • Patrick Coby • Erik Dempsey •  
Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman • Edward J. Erler • Maureen  
Feder-Marcus • Robert Goldberg • L. Joseph Hebert •  
Pamela K. Jensen • Hannes Kerber • Mark J. Lutz • Daniel  
Ian Mark • Ken Masugi • Carol L. McNamara • Will  
Morrisey • Amy Nendza • Charles T. Rubin • Leslie G.  
Rubin • Thomas Schneider • Susan Meld Shell • Geoffrey  
T. Sigalet • Nicholas Starr • Devin Stauffer • Bradford P.  
Wilson • Cameron Wybrow • Martin D. Yaffe • Catherine  
H. Zuckert • Michael P. Zuckert
- Copy Editor* Les Harris
- Designer* Sarah Teutschel
- Inquiries* ***Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy***  
Department of Political Science  
Baylor University  
1 Bear Place, 97276  
Waco, TX 76798
- email* [interpretation@baylor.edu](mailto:interpretation@baylor.edu)

---

Shadia B. Drury, *The Bleak Political Implications of Socratic Religion*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, xvii + 271 pp., \$150 (hardcover).

---

PETER MINOWITZ  
SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY  
*pminowitz@scu.edu*

Shadia Drury's publications represent a hybrid form of academic research, in which scholarship regularly morphs into a genre one might call "scoldership" or even "scaldership." Her primary aim is not to figure things out and to convey arguments that are meticulously grounded. Her primary aim is to arouse alarm, and she provides her readers with a steady diet of error and exaggeration.

Drury's approach has been particularly pernicious in connection with Leo Strauss and his students, regarding whom she has nonetheless garnered global acclaim; she spent decades denouncing if not demonizing a small scholarly "school" that was already wildly unpopular. In the book under review, by contrast, Drury's primary targets are two figures—Socrates and Plato—who have been cherished for millennia on multiple continents. Like most of her books, moreover, this volume opens up interesting perspectives on important issues in a lively and accessible manner. And although she here joins the ever-growing academic army that denounces dead white male Europeans, she elevates ancient playwrights (especially Sophocles and Euripides) along with the ultra-dead Homer. By far the most valuable chapter is the one that defends Homer and polytheism (131–70). Drury argues persuasively and efficiently that the life-loving Homeric gods would condemn genocide, dogmatism, fanaticism, inquisitions, crusades, and self-mortification. Finally, unlike the "takeaway" she presented to introduce the

2005 reprinting of her first book on Strauss,<sup>1</sup> the new volume accurately interprets her prior publications.

The first chapter presents “the political case against Socrates.” Drury here intensifies the critique I. F. Stone provided in his 1988 bestseller, *The Trial of Socrates*. Drury emphasizes that Socrates remained in Athens after the Thirty Tyrants took over in 404 BC (19–20, 95), and she dwells upon the evil deeds of Alcibiades, Charmides, and Critias. In her central chapter, “How Plato Legitimizes the Case for the Prosecution,” she goes even farther. Her Socrates leaves his students (along with his lovers and closest associates) “rationally dumbfounded, intellectually servile, and psychologically unhinged” (111); his “closest associates,” indeed, were “moral monstrosities—bloodthirsty killers, self-serving traitors, and fanatical oligarchs who were totally contemptuous of ordinary people” (106). Drury never pauses to indicate whether she includes Chaerephon, Crito, Plato, Xenophon, and Polemarchus (who was executed by the Thirty) among Socrates’s “closest associates.”

Drury makes other highly implausible political claims about Socrates and Plato: for Plato, democracy is “the only irredeemable form of government” (20); “clearly, Socrates was more extreme in his rejection of democracy than the mature Plato” (22); the *Apology* “provided no evidence of Socrates’ respect for law” (79); and “Socratic ideas invite violence and treachery on a grand scale” (126).

Drury’s last three chapters focus on the religious evils announced in her title, and her opening chapters also argue that Socratic religion spawned grave political abuses. Socrates’s conception of piety is “a destabilizing political concept that invites political violence and extremism” (36). Allying religion with morality has “contributed to immorality on a grand scale” (52). There is “no denying that the religion of Socrates was a threat to the well-being of the state—any state” (62). Being rooted in the “Orphic project of withdrawal from the attachments to the world and control over the desires of the body,” Socrates’s “conception of justice or righteousness” is “deeply flawed” (87). Drury wisely refrains, however, from claiming that religiosity helped impel Alcibiades, Charmides, and Critias to their violent and treacherous actions.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the conclusion of her first book, Drury asserts that Strauss, recognizing that “democratic society provides the sort of freedom that is necessary to the unhampered pursuit of the philosophical life,” is “not anti-democratic”; he even “makes it clear that he is not an enemy of democracy” (Shadia B. Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* [New York: St. Martin’s, 1988], 194). According to the introduction she wrote for the Iraq War reprinting, however, her book “showed” that Strauss was “a sworn enemy of freedom and democracy” (*The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, updated ed. [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005], ix).

The myth of Er, for Drury, represents the “cornerstone” of Plato’s moral teaching (149); she also emphasizes things that Socrates says about the after-life in *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Gorgias* (523a–c). Drury concludes that Socrates “chooses death, not reluctantly, but as the goal—the life-long quest of his philosophizing”; his “love of death and martyrdom were motivated by a quest for personal salvation, and the promise of eternal life among the blessed” (163); he “believes that we are all better off dead” (136). Because Socrates and Plato also maintained that the gods are “motivated *only* by concerns for justice or righteousness” (50), furthermore, they paved the way for “the totalitarian tyranny of the Catholic Church that engulfed Europe in the Middle Ages” (90).<sup>2</sup> This tyranny was merely “a Christianized Platonism” (90), and Plato was “the intellectual father of the Inquisition” (122). Drury here emphasizes the punishments for impiety in the *Laws* (121–24). She errs, however, when she states that the death penalty is required even for unbelievers who have “good character” and who inflicted no “injuries or harms” (122). The default punishment for being “impious in words or deeds” is imprisonment (*Laws* 907d–908a), and only two impiety crimes entail the death penalty: when someone, after serving five years in a special prison (the *sophonisterion*), is convicted again of impiety (909a); when someone who is “polluted” conducts a religious ritual (910d). And when Drury (in 130n110) cites 908c–909a to document her above-cited statement about the well-behaved unbelievers, she ignores the claim here that even a shady character who cleverly conceals his atheism “deserves *not* one nor two deaths” (908e).<sup>3</sup>

Extending such accusations against Socrates and Plato, the book’s last page provides one of Drury’s most inflammatory claims: “Unless the West abandons its Socratic hangover, it will remain indistinguishable from its most lethal enemy—the self-styled ‘Islamic State,’ whose motto is (with a menacing index finger lifted to the heavens) one God, one truth, one path!” (213).

---

<sup>2</sup> Drury is comparably hostile to religion in two of her earlier books. From “the moment that it wielded political influence under Constantine,” Drury writes, “the church has been a menace to peace”; the biblical God is “pathological,” and religion is “destructive of political peace, order, and justice” (Shadia B. Drury, *Aquinas and Modernity: The Lost Promise of Natural Law* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008], 53, 180n19, 163). She elsewhere argues that Heinrich Himmler was “more sensitive than the Christian saints and elect of God, not to mention God and his ‘angels’” (*Terror and Civilization: Christianity, Politics, and the Western Psyche* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004], 27).

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis added; I am quoting the 1980 Basic Books translation by Thomas L. Pangle. It is also relevant that Magnesia would impose the death penalty even for relatively minor crimes: e.g., testifying after having been convicted three times of giving “false testimony” (937c), stealing public property (941c–942a), “harboring a fugitive” (955b), making peace in private with parties against whom the community is warring (955c), and providing “some service to the fatherland” in exchange for “gifts” (955d).

Anyone who scrutinizes the stark and dramatic discussion of death Socrates offers at the end of the *Apology* can quickly fathom the weaknesses of Drury's claims that he exalted death and helped reorient Western civilization toward "the promise of eternal life" (163). Earlier, Socrates proclaimed that "no one knows" whether death might be the greatest good (29a–b), but he proceeds to state that he did *not* "know whether it is good or bad" (37b).<sup>4</sup> Although the uncertainty shrinks at 40c when he asserts that there are only two possibilities regarding death, it swells because of the stark contrast between the two: eternal nothingness versus a transmigration of the soul.<sup>5</sup> The annihilation version, which Drury never mentions, might have greater impact because Socrates articulates it without relying on an external authority, whereas he both introduces and elaborates transmigration as an inference from "the things that are said" (40c, 40e). The annihilation version, furthermore, would presumably be more compelling for future readers around the world. On the one hand, it develops the analogy between death and sleep, a process that every human being experiences. Nor does it involve encounters with minor mythical figures such as Rhadamanthys, Aeacus, Triptolemus, and Palamedes (41a–b).

If Socrates thought that death was eternal nothingness, Drury's attempts to center his life and his teaching on otherworldly bliss are completely absurd.<sup>6</sup> Drury also fails to note how the *Apology's* account of the afterlife differs from the Christian version: "all the dead are there" (40e), and no one is being punished—or rewarded—for things s/he did or said on earth.

Even more significant is Drury's failure to acknowledge that the post-death possibility Socrates associates with "inconceivable happiness" (41c) is one in which he would keep seeking wisdom for all eternity. By belittling Socrates's famous professions of ignorance (104–5, 135–36, 226–29, 242–43), Drury in effect afflicts him with her own *hubris*. One wishes that, during the decades she spent studying Strauss and his students, she had learned more

<sup>4</sup> I am quoting the translation provided by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West in *Four Texts on Socrates*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> In suggesting here that death is "like being nothing and the dead man has no perception of anything" (40c), Socrates anticipates the prospect that "there's nothing at all for one who's met his end" (*Phaedo* 91b, trans. Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem [Newburyport, MA: Focus Classical Library, 1998]). The sting of the *Apology* version is amplified by the reference to "all time" at 40e.

<sup>6</sup> These points about death are even more salient for anyone who accepts Drury's argument that Plato's early dialogues cannot be "totally inventive" because many of the targeted readers knew Socrates and "were present at his trial" (103); if Plato had taken huge liberties in the *Apology*, many Athenians could have denounced it.

about the challenges of interpreting dialogues. On a regular basis, indeed, Drury falls into the trap of assuming that Plato endorses every statement made by one of his “leading men” (especially Socrates and the Athenian Stranger). Her Plato thus ends up insisting (137, 149), complaining (149), believing (158), criticizing (164), claiming, and wanting (171).

Paving the way for Drury, Friedrich Nietzsche characterized Christianity as “Platonism for the ‘people’”<sup>7</sup> and defended Homer against Plato. Nietzsche, however, seemed to take Socratic skepticism more seriously than does Drury. And whereas Drury’s book never mentions the “ideas,” Nietzsche asserted that *Plato’s* “invention” of “the Good” was “the worst, the most prolonged, and the most dangerous of all errors.”<sup>8</sup> Drury credits Nietzsche for her main argument, but somewhat grudgingly (160, 173, 189), and she fails to confront Nietzsche’s infamous claims that God is dead. And while she acknowledges that nihilism can leave life “tasteless, insipid, worthless, and without purpose or meaning” (206), she does not worry that God’s death would eliminate “all comfort and hope, everything holy or healing,” leaving us nothing to worship beyond “rocks [*den Stein*], stupidity, gravity, fate, or nothingness” (*BGE*, §55). These memorable words might themselves suffice to refute Drury’s 2004 claim that Nietzsche’s posture toward Christianity was “a puerile revolt of the child against the parent.”<sup>9</sup>

In waging her revolt against Socrates, Drury also errs badly when invoking Xenophon. According to Drury, the *Memorabilia* informs us that it was “common knowledge that Socrates’ favorite topic was the utter absurdity of allowing ordinary people...to rule” (14). To document this (in 31n68), she cites a nonexistent section (2.2.37). I assume she meant to cite 1.2.37, in which Critias and Charicles mock Socrates for discussing shoemakers, builders, smiths, and herdsmen at such length. There is nothing here about “common knowledge,” Socrates’s “favorite topic,” absurdity, or the political competence of the *demos*. In fact, no passage in the *Memorabilia* supports Drury’s above-quoted claim, and Xenophon even asserts that Socrates was “well disposed toward the demos.”<sup>10</sup> Drury also distorts Xenophon’s *Hellenica* in the course

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. and ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), preface.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* On Socratic skepticism, see §191 and §202.

<sup>9</sup> Drury, *Terror and Civilization*, 122. Nietzsche, Drury adds, “merely celebrates whatever Christianity deems to be evil”; Christian assumptions are “so deeply ingrained in his thought, and weigh so heavily upon him that he had to rebel in order to gain an ounce of sanity and self-esteem” (123).

<sup>10</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, trans. Amy I. Bonnette (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1.2.60. Drury could have extracted some relevant material from 1.2.58 (especially if she consulted the

of arguing that “aristocratic” leanings motivated Socrates to recommend separate trials for the Arginusae generals; Xenophon never says that the shipwrecked sailors were “left to drown in their ships without oars or any way of escaping” (76–77).<sup>11</sup>

In “The Liberalism of Classical Political Philosophy,” Strauss dissects a 1957 book by classicist Eric Havelock that Drury commends in her annotated bibliography (238). Strauss anticipates being blamed for having written at length about “an unusually poor book.” He proceeds to lament that “the humane desire for tolerance” is being “perverted” into the “abandonment of all standards and hence of all discipline.” Such a perversion, Strauss concludes, is particularly pernicious when it afflicts “the very discipline which is responsible for the transmission of the classical heritage.”<sup>12</sup> In the name of tolerance, Shadia Drury has written a volume on classics that makes Havelock seem like a pillar of scholarly rectitude.

---

sentence from her beloved Homer that follows the lines Socrates was accused of reciting) and from 3.7.1–7.

<sup>11</sup> See *Hellenica* 1.6.34–1.7.35. Drury likewise errs when interpreting and citing Herodotus’s *Histories* and Aristotle’s *Politics*.

<sup>12</sup> Leo Strauss, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 63, 64.