

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Summer 2020

Volume 46 Issue 3

- 443 Lisa Leibowitz Poetic Justice: An In-Depth Examination of Aristophanes's Portrait of Socrates
- 471 Alessandro Mulieri A Modern in Disguise? Leo Strauss on Marsilius of Padua
- 495 Devin Stauffer Locke on the Limits of Human Understanding
- 513 Charles R. Sullivan Churchill's Marlborough: The Character of a Trimmer
- 533 Ying Zhang The Guide to *The Guide*: Some Observations on "How To Begin To Study *The Guide of the Perplexed*"
- Book Reviews:**
- 565 Marco Andreacchio *Dante's Philosophical Life: Politics and Human Wisdom in "Purgatorio"* by Paul Stern
- 573 Elizabeth Corey *Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss: The Politics of Renaissance and Enlightenment* by David McIlwain
- 579 Emily A. Davis *The Life of Alcibiades: Dangerous Ambition and the Betrayal of Athens* by Jacqueline de Romilly; translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings
- 585 Jerome C. Foss *The Catholic Writings of Orestes Brownson* by Michael P. Federici
- 589 Steven H. Frankel *Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America* by Mary Grabar
- 595 Raymond Hain *The Soul of Statesmanship: Shakespeare on Nature, Virtue, and Political Wisdom*, edited by Khalil M. Habib and L. Joseph Hebert Jr.
- 601 Richard Jordan *Democracy and Imperialism: Irving Babbitt and Warlike Democracies* by William S. Smith
- 607 Spencer Krauss *Homer's Hero: Human Excellence in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey"* by Michelle M. Kundmueller
- 613 Lucien Oulahbib *Lacan contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex and Politics*, edited by Nadia Bou Ali and Rohit Goel
- 627 Jan P. Schenkenberger *Briefwechsel 1919–1973* by Martin Heidegger and Karl Löwith, and *Fiala: Die Geschichte einer Versuchung* by Karl Löwith
- 639 Mark A. Scully *Bureaucracy in America: The Administrative State's Challenge to Constitutional Government* by Joseph Postell
- 645 Benjamin Slomski *The Rediscovery of America: Essays by Harry V. Jaffa on the New Birth of Politics* by Harry V. Jaffa, and *Unmasking the Administrative State: The Crisis of American Politics in the Twenty-First Century* by John Marini
- 655 Scott Yenor *Sparta's First Attic War: The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta, 478–446 B.C.* by Paul A. Rahe

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

Michael P. Federici, *The Catholic Writings of Orestes Brownson*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019, ix + 440 pp., \$70 (cloth).

JEROME C. FOSS

SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE

jerome.foss@stvincent.edu

Whether Catholics can be good American citizens has long been an open question, and the past decade or so has seen the list of naysayers grow considerably. America is fundamentally liberal, some argue, and liberalism is irreconcilable with the Catholic understanding of political order. Protestants and agnostics of the early republic were attracted to this position, but one is increasingly likely to hear this view articulated by Catholics in the twenty-first century. Early Americans were prone to dislike Catholicism; while that still may be the case, a tendency has grown within Catholicism to dislike America.

This is not to say that the antagonism on the part of some Catholics toward America is representative of the Catholic Church's view, or the views of most practicing Catholic Americans. What is startling is not the number, but the fact that the critics of America tend to be young and within academia, suggesting that the new generation of intellectual Catholics are less enamored with the American republic and more open to an alternative—without a clear idea of that alternative—than their parents and grandparents. In the second half of the twentieth century, American Catholics could take solace in fact that their leading thinkers were willing to hold as self-evident the truths of the Declaration of Independence. But is that still the case? Were mid-twentieth-century Catholic defenses of America, as some suggest, bound up with the wrongheaded, liberal-democratic spirit of Vatican II?

Anyone who answers this latter question in the affirmative would do well to acquire a copy of Michael P. Federici's edition of Orestes Brownson's

writings. This collection of thirteen essays by the nineteenth-century Catholic convert is a welcome addition to the discussions taking place today about the relationship between the Catholic faith and the American regime. This is a question that haunts Brownson's postconversion writings. Those whose acquaintance with Brownson goes no further than his 1866 *The American Republic* will benefit from reading the essays collected by Federici, which range from 1856 to 1874. Each of the essays attempts, in some manner, to understand not only how Catholics are situated in America, but also the positive role they can play, and indeed should play, if America is to survive and thrive. For Brownson, America's written Constitution will endure only if the unwritten moral constitution is well formed, and only the Catholic Church is in a position to provide the nation's populace with the necessary moral formation. Brownson is not arguing for the establishment of Catholicism as the official, sanctioned religion of the republic; rather, Catholicism for Brownson can and should serve as a public philosophy informing the laws, policies, and adjudications arrived at through the normal institutional governing processes.

Far from resting on a superficial understanding of the American founding, Brownson's argument that American citizens need Catholic formation relies on a careful examination of America's political heritage. As Federici points out in his introduction, "Brownson's political theory is consistent with the American framers' constitutional theory articulated in *The Federalist*" and "can be viewed as a defense of the framers' political theory against the contrary democratic ideologies of his age" (8). Those ideologies gave rise to the most dangerous of all political heresies in American history—secession. Brownson minced no words in denouncing Southern leaders for tearing the nation asunder, and criticized those who upheld the compact theory of the Union, the idea that the states retained their sovereign autonomy after the ratification of the Constitution. He held that the states are sovereign only as integrated parts of the Union, meaning they have no political identity outside the United States. Rebellion is thus an act of suicide.

Tied closely to states' rights is slavery, which Brownson strenuously argues is against the natural order of God's creation. The enslavement of African men and women is among the worst sins of the United States, and he agreed with President Lincoln that the nation could not remain divided on so important an issue. The essays in Federici's collection show, however, that Brownson's views on the proper mode of settling the slavery question changed over time, perhaps not surprisingly given the onset of civil war and the president's later Emancipation Proclamation. Like many, Brownson had

once hoped that the South could overcome the sin of slavery on their own, and was critical of enforcing such a measure upon them. Later reflection led him to see, again with Lincoln, that war measures such as emancipation were justifiable, but only as a means of securing peace. But when it came to reconstructing the Southern states, Brownson opposed the executive branch taking the lead, preferring instead Congress as the proper institutional vehicle for reunifying the nation.

What is clear in Brownson's essays is that he is not a party man. He faults Southern Democrats for their poor political thought and criminal acts of rebellion; but he is far from a blind follower of Lincoln's Republican Party, and is quick to criticize the president's often very difficult war decisions. The two guiding lights of Brownson's political thought are the natural law and the text of the US Constitution. Slavery is wrong because it violates natural law, even if the Constitution allows for it. Secession is wrong because it violates the Constitution, even if nature does not prescribe the union of North American states. Reconstruction has to be in accord with both the natural law and the text of the framers' Constitution. Analyzing the events of his day with the help of these two lights allowed him to be friendly to the American political order, without being friendly to organized political parties.

An interesting and unique inclusion by Federici is the essay—though really it is a short autobiographical book published in 1857—*The Convert; or, Leaves from My Experience*. While each of the other entries has something directly to do with American politics, this long piece (about 150 pages) is reminiscent of St. Augustine's *Confessions* far more than of *The City of God*. Brownson's concern is explaining how he came to believe in the tenets of the Roman Catholic faith, but only after giving a catalogue of the other theological and cosmological viewpoints he tried on first. Nothing fit, as it were, until he took seriously Catholic teaching. Brownson describes his work here as an attempt to tell the public his story, and to do so truthfully. Odd though it at first seems to include this with the far more political essays, Federici was right to do so, for *The Convert* tells the story of an unmistakably American citizen who believes in republican institutions, but is searching for a deeper set of moral convictions that can unite the political community. One of the themes of the story is the apparent contradiction between Catholic dogma and the republic. Brownson concludes that the church's teachings may be out of step with popular sentiment at a given moment, but not with the institutions of the regime or the political thought of the framers more generally.

This personal account of his life helps explain the positions—controversial then and now—Brownson defends in the other twelve essays.

If there is one sentence in the collection that best explains Brownson's political thought, it is the following: "Our work, after saving our souls, perhaps as one of the conditions of saving them, is to do what we can to save our country" (62). Every page gives evidence of a man who both passionately believes in all the Catholic Church teaches and is full of hope in what the American republic can become. That such hope could exist in the most turbulent of times America has ever seen should make us wonder at the apparent lack of hope among some leading Catholic intellectuals today. Perhaps it is impossible to be a good Catholic and a good citizen of America, but before we arrive at such a dismal conclusion, we should take seriously the claims of the leading nineteenth-century Catholic American thinker who thought the contrary. Thanks to Federici's efforts, we have, in addition to that thinker's *The American Republic*, a good collection of his essays with which to do so.