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Michael P. Federici: *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Pp. vii, 291.)

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Alexander Hamilton's role as a founding father has never really been questioned, but his reputation has hung in the shadows cast by aspersions that he preferred monarchical government over the limited government of the US Constitution and a belief that he was not above using Machiavellian machinations to achieve his objectives. Hamilton's reputation is being revised, however. Consider Lin-Manuel Miranda's popular YouTube "Hamilton Rap" video. Similarly, Michael P. Federici's *The Political Philosophy of Alexander Hamilton* concludes that much of what is commonly believed about Hamilton's moral beliefs, motives, and political philosophy is wrong. Federici makes a powerful case for Hamilton as a statesman and thinker whose "moral realism" and constitutional insights rival those of Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, or Adams.

Federici bases his findings primarily on an examination of Hamilton's vast corpus. Critics will ask whether Hamilton can be taken at his word when those words are mostly polemical, pragmatic responses to immediate political issues and not theory-driven, philosophical treatises. This is a legitimate question, particularly because Hamilton is commonly believed to be an amoral Hobbesian and Machiavellian who manipulates his words to achieve his objectives. Examples of Hamilton's duplicity often include misrepresenting Montesquieu in *Federalist* No. 9 and the ancient republics in *Federalist* No. 8, adopting the title of "Federalist" in the ratification debates, and his play at the New York ratifying convention that if New York did not adopt the Constitution then New York City might secede from New York and join the union. Are these the mistakes of an individual pressed by time and exigency, a statesman pressing and bending words to their limit without snapping their integrity, or is this evidence of Hamilton's amoral and manipulative character? These questions go unanswered, although Federici insists that Hamilton was a man of virtue and good character, a religious individual who believed in natural law and a final judgment, and claims that Hamilton was "as forthright and honest as statesmen come, especially in the expression of political ideas" (130). Proof of these claims requires reconstructing Hamilton's assumptions and philosophy to explain his positions and activities. Federici does this well, identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of Hamilton's writings and actions.

Hamilton, Federici argues, is an earnest, nonideological (although he could be partisan), complex thinker who draws from multiple philosophies and theories, but ultimately evaluates ideas against the "accumulated experience of the ages." Consequently, Hamilton's philosophy is easily distorted by

giving too much heed to a specific instance or writing without understanding the thoughtful balance between competing ideas that composes Hamilton's thought. Hence, Federici disagrees with previous studies and popular notions that describe Hamilton as a Machiavellian (Pocock, Rosano, Harper), amoral Hobbesian (Parrington), Lockean (Walling), liberal (Bailyn, Wood), or nationalist (Banning). Hamilton is obviously familiar with, and uses, ideas from Enlightenment philosophers but, Federici claims, he is also, like other founders, strongly influenced by classical and Christian ideas. Hamilton's eclectic thinking produces a philosophy of moral realism that some view as "dark and pessimistic" but which realistically assesses the problem of politics.

Federici finds Hamilton's political philosophy grounded on a morally realistic philosophical anthropology. Philosophical anthropology is the "search for human nature's universal qualities and its bearing on the individual and society" (50). Hamilton's philosophical anthropology views human nature as dualistic—that is, within man exists good and evil in permanent tension. Some men succumb to their passions and the human propensity toward greed and power, but not all. Some may develop excellent character and the virtues of magnanimity and prudence, which allows them to resist selfish desires, to be committed to republicanism and the common good, and to make wise decisions. In short, Hamilton sees man's nature as fixed, but human character as malleable (51). This leads to diversity in the characters of men: some are base or easily manipulated and others are virtuous and wise. The former are threats to order and security; the latter compose the natural aristocracy.

Hamilton's realistic assessment of human nature influenced his political philosophy. Hamilton's recognition of man's potential goodness led him to support republican government directed by leaders of character, possessing republican virtue and seeking the public good (51, 219). To constrain man's evil tendencies that lead to disorder and abuses of liberty and power, Hamilton favored constitutionalism with its separation of powers, and checks and balances. Recognizing man's mixed nature leads Hamilton to favor mixed solutions such as a mixed regime, institutions with mixed powers, mixed national and state sovereignty, a mixed economy, and mixing private and public influences (246).

Hamilton's moral realism also contributed to his pragmatism. His assessments of situations were based on circumstances—"the particularities of contemporary life"—and historical experience, which showed the patterns of enduring human order (74–75, 157). Politics for him was the art of the possible. He was willing to call on self-interest to achieve public good, but thought "religion and morality indispensable to good government" (65). His belief in natural law and emphasis on assessing ideas based on the accumulated experience of the ages led him to avoid Hobbesian amoralism, Rousseauian romantic idealism, ahistorical abstraction, and theoretical speculation.

By pulling together Hamilton's extensive corpus, Federici has developed a coherent understanding of Hamilton's political theory. Verification of this approach depends on whether Federici's description of Hamilton's political theory can explain Hamilton's various arguments and actions. Federici achieves this in separate chapters that examine Hamilton's theories of constitutionalism, political administration, international relations, and views of political economy. Along the way he also addresses Hamilton's understanding of nationalism, executive power, judicial theory, federalism, constitutional interpretation, debt, and taxes.

The weakness of Hamilton's political theory and intense focus on circumstances and experience, Federici finds, prevented him from recognizing a number of potential problems. He failed to recognize the potential abuse of a "broad interpretation" of the Constitution, the potential abuse of judicial encroachments, and the cultural supports needed to buttress the Constitution.

This is a rich and developed book. It is a bit frustrating at first because the author's specific claims rely often on a general understanding of Hamilton's thought rather than Hamilton's specific words. For example, Federici argues that Hamilton was not the monarchist, nationalist, or centralizer of national power that many believe. Yet he produces no letters or sentences to directly counter such claims. His argument rests on recognizing that Hamilton's words must be understood within Hamilton's political theory and within the context, time, and circumstances of the specific issue Hamilton was addressing. When considered from this perspective, Federici's arguments are coherent and balanced. Hamilton's political thinking does indeed deserve greater attention today, and Federici provides a valuable contribution toward that understanding.

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### CHECKS, BALANCES, AND LIBERTY

Patrick M. Garry: *Limited Government and the Bill of Rights*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012. Pp. 194.)

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A crucifix may ward away vampires, but should we believe that the Bill of Rights has the same effect on despotism? Americans are indeed a superstitious people in this respect, certain that what James Madison called "parchment barriers" can actually limit something so boundless as political power. Yet political power is surprisingly responsive to the Bill of Rights, at least when it is interpreted by the US Supreme Court. One ruling, and Congress, presidents, state governments, and almighty democracy itself