Aurelian Craiutu, *Faces of Moderation: The Art of Balance in the Age of Extremes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 304 pp., ISBN 9780812248760 (hbk) $59.95/£48.00, | ISBN 9780812224092 $24.95/£18.99 (pbk).

Reviewed by Michael L. Frazer

Aurelian Craiutu is a remarkably productive scholar with an immoderate interest in moderation. *Faces of Moderation* is his third monograph on the topic, which was also an important theme in his book on the Doctrinaires, as well as a number of articles, chapters in edited volumes, and new editions of works in translation by the moderate thinkers discussed in his scholarship.

Craiutu’s focus on moderation predates the populism and extremism dominating global politics today. He explains that his research agenda was a response to growing up in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania. Craitutu wrote *Eologiul moderaiței* (Editura Polirom, 2006) for a popular audience to urge Romanians to embrace a virtue which Ceaușescu notably lacked. Having more recently lived through not only the vice-presidency, but also the governorship of Mike Pence (Craiutu is Professor of Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington), he cannot be pleased that the past few years have made his line of research remarkably timely. Moderation is a virtue most needed, and hence of most interest, when it is least widespread.

Craiutu’s previous monograph, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748-1830* (Princeton University Press, 2012) began with a brief history of moderation from the ancient Greeks to the early moderns, followed by chapters on Montesquieu, the Monarchiens, and three key figures of the Coppet circle: Jacques Necker, Germaine de Staël, and Benjamin Constant. We have been promised a sequel that will trace the story of French moderation through the end of the nineteenth century, but in the meanwhile Craiutu has jumped ahead to the twentieth.

While the historical setting of *Faces of Moderation* is different, the structure remains the same. Theoretical analyses and defenses of moderation in the introduction and conclusion serve to frame intellectual profiles of a series of moderates. The cast here consists of Raymond Aron, Isaiah Berlin, Noberto Bobbio, Michael Oakeshott, and Adam Michnik; others make appearances, but only in terms of their relationship to these five key figures.

Yet it is not only the form of the two books that is similar. The substance of what moderation commands also remains the same. Craiutu’s 2012 volume concludes with a “decalogue” of moderation. The virtue is (1) multi-faceted, a matter of (2) individual temperament, but also (3) political institutions and constitutions. Moderation is (4) devoted to both value pluralism and inalienable rights. Moderates have (5) a coherent political vision, but (6) their efforts as “trimmers” to keep the ship of state on an even keel by leaning to the left or right as circumstances require may make their (7) eclecticism sometimes falsely appear to be opportunism, (8) conservatism, (9) apathy, complacency, or indecisiveness. At the same time, however, moderation is (10) not a virtue fit for everyone in all times and places. Since extremism, too, may sometimes play a positive political role, even moderation itself is only to be practiced in moderation.

The entire decalogue still applies when we move from the era of the guillotine to that of the Gulag. Craiutu says that it also applies in the era of Guantanamo and #MAGA, though he saves a discussion of today’s politics for another promised future book. Yet while certain features of moderation are always the same, others must change with the times. The result is that “moderation cannot be studied in the abstract, but only as instantiated in specific historical and political contexts” since “what is moderate in one context and period may significantly differ from what is moderate at another point in time” (p. 3).

Craiutu implies that this is a distinctive feature of the specific virtue under consideration, but it would also apply for any trait of individuals or institutions that requires significant practical wisdom about individual circumstances. The best way to learn about any such virtue—indeed, if Aristotelian particularism is correct, to learn about any virtue at all—is to examine it in the judgments and actions of specific individuals and groups. Just as profiles of moderation in practice may be more useful than formal analyses or idealized theories of the concept, so too may profiles in courage, magnanimity, justice, and so on.

While there is a popular contrast between realism and moralism in political theory, Craiutu’s is an excellent example of the realistic depiction of a moral virtue acting in history, something that normative political theorists are better equipped than either analytic philosophers or value-neutral historians to provide. Experts on each of the authors discussed will undoubtedly find details with which to quibble, but *Faces of Moderation* nonetheless combines the ethical acuity, historiographical rigor, philosophical insight, hermeneutic subtlety, and authorial eloquence characteristic of this sort of interdisciplinary political theory at its best.

The main drawback to Craiutu’s approach is that while it does a great deal to teach those already convinced of its value how to practice moderation, it can do little to convince those from François de La Rouchefoucauld to Barry Goldwater who doubt that moderation qualifies as a virtue at all. A more moderate rejection of moderation might instead grant that it is a virtue, but argue that it is a relatively unimportant one, unobjectionable among academics but ill-suited to the rough and tumble of actual politics. This concern is hardly assuaged by the authors profiled by Craiutu, whose successes are mostly intellectual, and whose failures are mostly political, with Michnik the notable exception. The other thinkers discussed recognize this as a serious drawback of their personal (second commandment) moderation; Bobbio is not alone among Craiutu’s heroes in admitting that he was temperamentally “unsuited to politics” (p. 112).

By profiling moderates but not their critics, Craiutu’s books not only become repetitive as each commandment in his Decalogue is repeatedly obeyed, but they also fail to do justice to the many ways moderation has been opposed. Each of the moderates profiled in *Faces of Moderation* had their compellingly anti-moderate opponents, but rather than focusing on them, when Craiutu shifts away from his five main characters it is mostly to consider the contributions of their allies. The longest single tangent is a discussion of Leszek Kołakowski in the Michnik chapter, whose moderation was not so different from Michnik’s own.

The failure to consider one’s opponents with charity and care not only weakens the case for moderation, it also betrays the virtue itself, which insists that “truth is almost never the monopoly of a single camp” (p. 232). Craiutu repeatedly praises his heroes for devoting so much of their intellectual energy to understanding thinkers with whom they disagreed, but does not follow their lead in this regard. To the contrary, there is frequent demonization of “anxious prophets of extremity, confident heralds of salvation and doom, and self-righteous philistines” (p. 148).

While some might argue that the weakest feature of this otherwise compelling monograph is its failure to practice the dialogical charity that it preaches, others may question whether the story of moderation in the twentieth century is best told through profiles of five European men. The absence of Americans from the main cast, as well as European exiles primarily working in America, is striking. Craiutu acknowledges that, not only did Arthur Schelsinger, Jr., Lionel Trilling, and other Americans play a central role in moderate thought at the time, but the American constitution also served as the main model of institutional (third commandment) moderation throughout the twentieth century, just as the English constitution did in earlier eras. Indeed, this is exactly the role that Publius’ constitutionalism plays in Craiutu’s own 2006 book for a Romanian audience.

The absence of Americans from center stage in Craiutu’s drama is, in turn, is related to two other forms of exclusion. First, the absence of those working in America means that, although Judith Shklar is referenced and clearly an inspiration throughout, neither she, Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt nor any other female moderate ever takes the spotlight for long. Given the work that Craiutu has already done to reintroduce de Staël into the political-theoretical canon, this is surprising.

Second, although Oakeshott and Michnik wrote on religion, the thinkers discussed are predominantly secular, and the role of religion in promoting moral and political moderation remains under-explored. Perhaps the exclusion of Reinhold Neibuhr can be justified by the book’s European focus, but the same cannot be said of Weil or Jacques Maritain. This is unfortunate, not only because so much of the discourse of moderation and extremism today focuses on religion, but because the tendency to use religious terminology for moderation’s many antonyms (fanaticism, zealotry, fundamentalism, dogmatism, the “politics of faith,” and so on) might give the false impression that religion is itself immoderate as such, an impression that Michnik was determined to combat.

To all this, however, Craiutu could easily respond that one book cannot do everything. Once his promised works on mid-to-late-nineteenth-century French moderation and moderation today are both completed, perhaps he will turn to critics of moderation, as well as moderation in the twentieth-century United States, in political theology, in movements for racial and gender equality, or in the global struggle for decolonization. There is no indication that, after three monographs on moderation and two more in the works, he has come close to exhausting the topic.