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Abstracts

PAOLO L. BERNARDINI, *La libertà di essere schiavi. Rileggendo “Cannibals All! Or Slaves without Masters” di George Fitzhugh (1857)*

Conservative political theorist George Fitzhugh (1806-1881) deserves a special place in 19th Century American political thought. A staunch defender of slavery in times in which it was universally perceived as morally negative and started to be perceived as economically weak and counter-productive, he is the champion of what Louis Hartz once called “reactionary Enlightenment”, a movement of thought prevalent in ante-bellum USA, pre-1859. In this essay, I attempt to demonstrate that Fitzhugh was a keen reader of European authors and that he should be placed in the global anti-Modern movement that marked the 19th Century, from France to Japan. Furthermore, under a mere theoretical perspective, I argue that there is a “right to become slave”, and that if the status of slave is achieved by free, mutual, agreement, slavery might be seen as tolerated in a liberal society, where everyone is entitled to dispose of her/his goods, freedom being the most substantial among individual goods. I do so by discussing and/or presenting literature on Fitzhugh, an author that underwent more or less one entire century of oblivion, and that is worth of further investigations, also for his capacity to introduce into the American debate key figures of European conservatism such as Thomas Carlyle.

Keywords:

George Fitzhugh

Liberalism

Slavery

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