

interpretation

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Rhetoric and American Statesmanship. Edited by Glen Thurow and Jeffrey D. Wallin. (Jointly published by Carolina Academic Press and The Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy, Durham, North Carolina, and Claremont, California, 1984. 151 pp.: paper, \$7.95.)

WILL MORRISEY

The senior editor intends “to recapture and examine the older tradition of republican rhetoric and to contrast it with the rhetoric dominating our public life today.” He would do so not for purposes of historiography but for purposes of statesmanship. As citizens forget the principles of republican government, the republican statesman’s task becomes, obviously, progressively dependent upon mere fortune. That statesman’s task involves understanding those principles and making them understood or, at least, sufficiently understood to withstand challenge. Understanding political principles requires speech—private speech, which is philosophic at its best, and public or rhetorical speech. But if we conceive of rhetoric as the use of words as weapons, and if we replace speech with ‘communication,’ we lose the distinctions between freedom and slavery, humanness and animality. The eight essayists in this volume insist on these distinctions.

Eva T. H. Brann and Forrest McDonald examine the rhetoric of two American founders, Madison and Hamilton. Brann gives a careful interpretation of Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance” to the Virginia Assembly, a petition against Patrick Henry’s bill establishing a provision for teachers of religion. Madison’s politically successful argument emphasized the individuality of religious convictions, that is, the absolute duty of each person to God and the allegedly consequent right to privacy of conscience. This argument for religious liberty does not presuppose a doctrine of “mental liberty,” for Madison believed opinions and beliefs involuntary. One might say that Madison reflects a paradox if not a contradiction of much modern thought: its enthusiasm for religious, political, and economic liberty based on a doctrine of mental determinism. Indeed, in private correspondence Madison advocated the encouragement of numerous small religious congregations (at times citing Voltaire as his source for this inspiration) in an argument he would reiterate in political terms during his famous treatment of, and for, faction. Madison’s Humean rhetoric of “measured passion and sober ardor” advanced a “harmonizing of the *spirit* of the Enlightenment and the *claims* of Christianity” (emphasis added).

McDonald recovers Hamilton’s distinction between popular and public opinion—the former being vulgar, the latter associated with the status and responsibility of manhood. Popular opinion is democratic; public opinion is republican. McDonald goes further, writing that in the 1780s Hamilton “learned from study of the principles of natural law that morality, in the long run, was a more stable foundation for government than was economic self-interest.” Hamilton, then,

was an Aristotelian. McDonald claims, notwithstanding the somewhat dubious standing of natural *law* in Aristotle's thought. McDonald acknowledges that in *Federalist* No. 31 Hamilton treats geometric and moral truths as equally certain, a more 'Enlightenment' than Aristotelian thing to do, but he insists that Hamilton did this only for rhetorical effect. McDonald also acknowledges Hamilton's intellectual debts to Smith and Hume, but does not here explore their relation to Aristotelianism.

The rarity of traditional rhetoric in this century may be seen in the fact that the editors select only one American, Calvin Coolidge, who is supplemented by Winston Churchill. Thomas B. Silver finds Coolidge's central theme "not the exaltation of greed but the exhortation to virtue," more, to "classical ideals." Silver rejects the characterization of our founders as Lockceans, insisting that

modern democracy does not arise out of the licentious impulses in the human soul. It arises as a response to arbitrary or artificial rule.

Far from rejecting human excellence or virtue, modern democracy presupposes the individual's self-government, Silver argues. This edifying interpretation of the founders' thought must of course withstand a careful examination of what those great men meant by the arbitrary or artificial and its opposite, the natural.

Larry P. Arnn presents a subtle argument concerning Churchill's rhetoric. Examining two early Churchillian writings (an essay on rhetoric and a political novel), Arnn discovers a much more complex mind than most detractors or admirers have suspected. In the essay, Churchill writes that rhetoric manipulates human beings by exploiting both human ignorance and the human desire to know; by the use of analogy, connecting the known to the unknown, the concrete to the abstract, the finite to the infinite, the rhetorician wields what Churchill calls a weapon, one that can, in Arnn's words, "dominate a political issue." Churchill appears to redeem the rhetorician by claiming that he must be open and sympathetic to the people, sentimental and earnest. He is a manipulator, but not a "detached manipulator." A detached manipulator would be a tyrant.

In *Savrola*, Churchill's only novel, we find a somewhat different teaching. The rhetorician is "responsible for the actions of the crowd he addresses," therefore not completely *of* the people. "Savrola's democracy . . . is a democracy founded upon an unchanging standard, a standard that determines what constitutes excellence or superiority. . . ." Discovering that standard requires private thought, not public speech or sympathy. Although Arnn does not explicitly say so, this means that the Churchillian rhetorician is something of a detached manipulator. Still, he is no tyrant. He is perhaps not quite a philosopher, either; he is an "independent statesman." Rhetoric "unites the two aspects in [the independent statesman], the aspect having more to do with the urgencies of the moment, and the aspect having more to do with the enduring questions posed by politics."

With the exception of Silver's Coolidge, each of the "traditional" rhetoricians

combines classical and modern thought in some way. Given limitations of space, none of the writers except Brann precisely measures the ratio of classical to modern. The volume's other four writers discuss contemporary 'rhetoric,' better called "popular or mass rhetoric" (Jeffrey Tulis), "liberal democratic rhetoric" (John Zvesper), Holmesian rhetoric (Walter Berns), or "communication" (Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.). Whatever it is called, there is no doubt concerning its modernity.

Tulis remarks that the founders and almost all of the nineteenth-century presidents spoke to the people through Congress, appealing to Constitutional principles. The only one who did not was Andrew Johnson, and the tenth Article of Impeachment against him cited "intemperate, inflammatory, and scandalous harangues, delivered in a loud voice." By contrast, Woodrow Wilson spoke to Congress through the people, anticipating the now-customary practice of attempting "to build 'visions' of the future out of undisciplined vulgarizations of leading strands of contemporary thought." As a result, Tulis notes, Congressional deliberation atrophies, presidential thought declines to crowd level, and the people lose respect for their putative leaders.

Zvesper describes the problem faced by Wilson's political heir, Franklin Roosevelt. Rightly pointing to the anti-rhetorical character of modern liberalism, which associates rhetoric with "passionate controversy" and "illiberal claims to power," Zvesper sees that liberals must seek a way to "say something as strong as these claims" without becoming themselves illiberal. Liberals must learn to combine "finality and progress," "moderation and daring." Roosevelt did not entirely succeed in this. He was too 'conservative' in the sense that he wrongly assumed U.S. industrialization had ended, that the political task was to more justly manage a permanently limited economy. Administrators, captains of social work, would replace captains of industry. In attempting to effect this replacement, Roosevelt not only neglected entrepreneurial daring but occasionally neglected rhetorical moderation, as in his complaints against the "new despotism" of "economic royalists." Zvesper encourages "righteous anger" against individual opponents but deplores "passionate hatred" aroused against a social/economic class.

Walter Berns finds a forerunner of Wilson not in the partisan political arena but on the Supreme Court. Owing in part to the influence of Oliver Wendell Holmes, "instead of defending constitutional principle from popular majorities, the Supreme Court . . . has come to see its function as that of imposing 'modern authority' on a population that is not disposed to accept." As with the office of the presidency, this high trendiness causes the people to "lose respect" for the Constitution.

Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., agrees with Berns that the phrase 'modern authority' constitutes a near-oxymoron. What is now called 'communication,' as distinguished from rhetoric, levels distinctions among citizens of different countries and in that sense is apolitical. Communication stresses novelty as against tradi-

tion and custom, the 'rule' of 'intellectuals' as against political rule, and the excitation of "feelings" (particularly compassion and indignation, those associated with insecurity, mortality) as against religion or philosophy. Mansfield calls this "an idealism of materialism." Not speech or deliberation but decision, tending toward the arbitrary, issues from this peculiar idealism. Among philosophers, Kant insisted on the moral importance of decision, but he was no simple materialist. "Today we might regard Kant's confidence in knowing evil and good as naïve, but to make up for this, we assume with greater complacency than he that ignorance of good and evil do not matter." By "we" Mansfield means democrats generally but democratic intellectuals preeminently. Such complacency tends to undercut intellectuality itself:

How can intellectuals maintain their status if they admit that information has replaced deliberation and no longer assert that the intellect elevates them above others? To reflect on that question, a philosopher is needed.

The philosopher might begin by considering Madison's mental determinism and the extent to which it might weaken the deliberative capacity.

This book should strengthen the deliberative capacity of its readers and therefore deserves as large a readership as can be reconciled with deliberativeness.

Problems of Modern Liberalism

WILL MORRISEY

Power, State, and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy. By Douglas J. Den Uyl. (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1983. xii + 172 pp.: paper, \$14.00.)

"Spinoza's approach to political issues is decidedly modern," by which Den Uyl means "scientific or positivistic." That is, Spinoza's "fundamental concepts" are "devoid of normative content" although some of his other, nonfundamental "principles" do have "normative content." This foundation presents a difficulty. Modern science at least appears to begin with the "normative": an invitation to conquer nature. At the same time, its proponents insist on 'realism,' by which they mean, among other things, the rejection of teleology. What is the relation of the modern 'norm' to the modern 'freedom' from 'values'?

In five chapters and two appendices Den Uyl explores the dual character of Spinozist modernity. In the first chapter he discusses Spinoza's version of natural right. Spinoza regards human law as 'normative' and nature as non-'normative.' He regards right and power as "co-extensive terms." "[O]ne has the right to do

whatever one can do." Den Uyl claims that according to Spinoza "it cannot be said that the man who acts according to reason is acting more in accord with natural right than the man who acts exclusively from passion or appetite," but he also sees that Spinoza considers rational men more powerful than impassioned man. Den Uyl does not explicitly draw the conclusion: if right and power are co-extensive terms and rational men are finally the most powerful, then he who acts according to reason does act more in accord with right. Den Uyl claims that Spinoza differs from Hobbes in that Hobbes does not equate right with power but with "right reason"; thus Hobbes was "clearly tied to the older normative traditions." But if right reason does yield power, then those ties do not bind. "Spinoza's equation of right and power is perhaps the most novel feature of his political theory." Perhaps—but one might consider not only Hobbes but Bacon, Descartes, and Machiavelli.

Making right and power co-extensive gives "normative" human law a tenuous moral status. In subsequent chapters Den Uyl explores Spinoza's version of the state, the nature and foundations of political authority, and the relation of power to liberty. Den Uyl somewhat incautiously assumes that any teaching not found in the *Political Treatise* cannot be Spinoza's final teaching, even if it is found in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. He makes this assumption because Spinoza tells readers that "he will discuss what is relevant to his task in the [*Political Treatise*] without requiring the reader to consult his other works." Fortunately, Den Uyl sees that the two books share "a remarkable similarity in their theoretical foundations." Nonetheless, some readers may wish for a more careful consideration of Spinoza's literary devices. Although Den Uyl reads Spinoza with intelligence, it is difficult for him to prove his usually stimulating interpretations. Den Uyl is perhaps even more right than he realizes when he suggests that "casting off prejudices is perhaps the most difficult task facing the reader of Spinoza; for it is not uncommon for Spinoza to attach unfamiliar meanings to familiar terms." To understand those meanings, their context must be considered; to understand a book by Spinoza, *its* context, namely, Spinoza's books, must be considered.

Den Uyl's interpretations include the suggestion that "fear and love are the two basic passions by which one may fall under the authority of government." Thus "the government has no authority over the reasonable man," who is "his own master, his own authority." Thus, the distinction between citizen and slave is rendered problematic by the political philosopher sometimes regarded as the founder of modern liberalism. Spinozist "political authority" is "norm-giving" but "determined by power." Spinoza's "is a philosophy of liberty only to the extent that liberty can be equated or shown to be consistent with a theory of power."

Spinoza reconciles power and liberty by contending that reason liberated from passion and superstition is the source of power. The *civitas* is most powerful when acting rationally. Perhaps because reason requires the elimination of contradictions (Den Uyl does not say), peace "is the political expression of reason or

rational action.” Because true power aims at, even yields, peace, the Spinozist state allows fairly substantial individual liberty. True power does not concern itself with regulating private vices. Tyranny depends too much on fear instead of “willing obedience to the law”; it is inefficient largely because of its irrational deployment of power.

In Spinoza one sees many of the elements of modern liberalism. Difficulties now well known to us, most particularly those concerning the character of reason, come to light in the writings of this conspicuously daring philosopher. If reason is a means of action instead of the best means of contemplating truth, it seems to be reconciled with politics in a way rejected by the ancients. But if reason is essentially ‘active,’ what can it serve but the body? And does not service to the body eventually corrupt reason and empower the passions? Will such corruption and empowerment eventually yield the destruction of the liberal order, then despotism?

John Stuart Mill and the Pursuit of Virtue. By Bernard Semmel. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984. xi + 212 pp.: cloth, \$17.50.)

John Stuart Mill may understand the problematic character of modern reason better than any subsequent liberal. He faults both Bentham and Comte for inclining toward despotism, for misusing reason in ways that undermine liberty.

Semmel reports that Mill’s father impressed upon his son the lesson of a story from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. The Sophist Prodicus relates that the young Hercules met two beautiful young women at a crossroads. Hercules rejected the advances of one, called “Happiness” by her admirers, “Vice” by her detractors. He preferred “Virtue,” who taught that true happiness comes from exertion, particularly exertions in the service of others. According to Semmel, this lesson “shape[d] at the root the character of John Stuart Mill’s liberalism.” Far from choosing the easy way of false “Happiness,” Mill was animated by the “spirit” of “Hercules and the Christian-Stoics of the Renaissance.” “We live by myths, sometimes without being fully aware that we do,” Semmel writes. “The choice of Hercules may be seen as Mill’s personal myth,” a myth he “translated . . . into a public myth as the necessary basis of a good society.”

To say that Mill lived by a myth is to question—perhaps without being fully aware of it—Mill’s status as a philosopher, as one capable of transcending myth. Semmel never suggests that a third, “middle” way between private vice and public virtue might have been available to Mill. (See Leo Strauss: *Xenophon’s Socrates*, Cornell University Press, 1972, pp. 35–38). He does not remark that the man who tells the story of Prodicus telling the story of Hercules is the philosopher, Socrates. This confirms Semmel’s own observation that he does not “adopt the . . . approach” of “political theorists and philosophers” but rather

that of “the historian of ideas.” One might question whether this “approach” can bring anyone to historical accuracy.

This notwithstanding, Semmel does provide a good introduction to Mill’s principal concerns and to the *ethos* in which Mill operated. Perhaps without being fully aware of it, Semmel shows that the young Mill was no philosopher but an intellectual who could sympathize, up to a point, with the antics of the Saint-Simonians. Semmel retells the amusing story of B.-P. Enfantin, the “*Père Suprême*” of the group, who called for a “female messiah” to save women from marriage on the one hand and from prostitution on the other. “Enfantin and forty of his disciples retired to a monastic retreat at his Paris estate of Ménilmontant, where they took up a celibate life” in anticipation of this feminist redeemer’s arrival. Understandably enough, the strategy soon gave way to a more active one. “[C]onvinced that this new messiah would be found in a Turkish harem,” they departed on a pilgrimage to Constantinople “*pour chercher la femme libre.*” Viewing these incidents from the other side of the English Channel, “Mill’s patience was exhausted.” He “could suggest only that such was the inevitable consequence of a good idea [equality of the sexes] fallen into the hands of Frenchmen.” Sober Virtue was better loved in England.

To strengthen his case for Mill’s “Stoicism,” Semmel quotes remarks praising the Stoics and criticizing the Epicureans. He omits remarks praising the Epicureans and criticizing the Stoics. In his post-1840 writings, Mill never hesitated to make use of divers allies—as he did, for example, in *Utilitarianism*, wherein the young Socrates, Epicurus, Bentham, and Jesus are all commended as exemplars of utilitarian ethics. “Mill’s mind was essentially illogical,” the unreconstructed Benthamite W. S. Jevons charged. Alternatively, one might wonder if Mill was a philosopher who had mastered rhetoric. (See Paul Eidelberg: *A Discourse on Statesmanship*, University of Illinois Press, 1974, pp. 402–3). The latter possibility implies an interesting Mill. It deserves more extended investigation by someone who understands the issues.

Meanwhile, we have Semmel’s essay, which says things worth saying about a neglected aspect of Mill. Semmel reminds contemporary liberals of several facts: Mill opposed the practice of paying government debts with inflated currency; he opposed the abolition of capital punishment; he endorsed a wartime government’s right to seize enemy goods in neutral ships; he praised the Swiss practice of universal military conscription. “. . . Mill saw himself countering the tendencies of a weak-willed, commercial, modern democratic society and providing a basis for a virtuous one.” Semmel traces this spiritedness to Machiavelli, perhaps without being fully aware of all the issues involved.

Semmel regards the unsystematic nature of Mill’s writings as deliberate, but not rhetorically deliberate. System-building “would merely confirm the tendency toward liberticide” seen in Bentham and Comte. As noted previously, Semmel does not sufficiently reflect upon possible additional motives for apparently un-

systematic presentation. However, the avoidance of intellectual despotism and the consequent insistence that the reader think for himself surely explain some of what Mill is about. Intellectual and moral activity guard against tyranny. Passivity does not. "Like the ancient philosophers whom he admired, and their Christian-Stoic disciples of the Renaissance, as well as the moral philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment and the humanists Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, Mill understood that a good society could not long survive the eclipse of a freely chosen virtue." On the basis of that sentence, Semmel may be said to be wiser than he is learned.

Essays in Political Philosophy. By J. E. Parsons, Jr. Preface by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982. x + 359 pp.: cloth \$26.25, paper \$14.25.)

Parsons sees that liberalism both tends toward and is threatened by historicism. He suspects Mill has this tendency and he identifies Dewey as a victim of it. Nine chapters contain interpretations of writings by eight political thinkers; the final chapter contains a discussion of liberalism's severest problem, belief as reflected by the problem of consent. As Mansfield writes in the book's informative preface, all the chapters "take their bearing from the author's reflections on liberalism."

The first two chapters concern a pair of thoughtful statesmen who advanced liberalism in Britain. A 'modern' "regarded as a prime mover and shaper" of the 1688 settlement, Lord Halifax espoused a restrained Machiavellianism. An "ancient in temperament and philosophy" who espoused Epicureanism, Sir William Temple shared Halifax's preference for mixed regimes over monarchies. Both men also shared an interest in diluting the religious passions that wracked the England of their time. In practice, the 'battle of the books' featured some soldiers on opposite sides who nonetheless collaborated for the sake of civil peace.

The next two chapters concern La Rochefoucauld and Hobbes. La Rochefoucauld views human nature with "Christian (even Augustinian) 'pessimism'" while espousing a restrained Machiavellianism in politics.

... his evident partiality to private virtues exceeds his concern for public ones. In this sense he is a liberal, a lover of privacy.

Hobbes, who viewed human nature 'pessimistically' if not religiously, prefers public matters to private ones. He, too, served liberalism, however, by using a doctrine of political sovereignty to attack the religiously based sovereignty of ecclesiastics.

John Locke is perhaps the first liberal political philosopher easily recognizable as such today. Parsons devotes his two central chapters to Locke's teachings. He shows the importance of economics to Locke, who "attempts to exorcise the still

lingering phantom of theology in economic matters” and, one is tempted to say, in almost everything else. “[C]ivil society must provide for the institutionalization of the right to property in such a way as to make *nature*, not theological teachings, the guide to survival.” But nature guides Lockean men only so long as it takes to overthrow religion. Civil rights in the civil society replace the natural rights of the state of nature. Locke confesses that nature has little intrinsic value, that human desire imposes value and human labor realizes that value. “Locke’s *homo faber* does not seem to be indebted to any other power but the strength of his mind and the force of his labor.” As Parsons observes, Locke follows Spinoza. Locke believes reason “an adding, subtracting and calculating faculty . . . the organization of consciousness, as consciousness is but the organization of sense experience.” This “nominalist reductionism” yields “relativism as to ultimate truth,” leaving a doctrine whereby only materialism can be certain.

Obviously, thoroughgoing materialism rules out any epistemology but empiricism, and Parsons next turns to Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. “The rational principle subsisting in things is more probably the product of generation than the cause itself of things being generated.” The telling phrase, “more probably,” suggests that radical empiricism yields scepticism. But empiricism always aims doubt more toward ideals than toward itself. Indeed, “the Humean deity tends to resemble Hume as he wished to think of himself”—no scepticism there. Still, materialism exacts its price. Hume believes that instinct is more powerful than reason even in the philosopher. The Humean god cannot be *thought* thinking itself but only *sense* sensing itself. The ‘conservative’ Hume contributes to liberalism’s anti-religious enterprise even as he calls into question liberalism’s own rationale.

Mill and Dewey, the subjects of the next two chapters, both attempt to rescue the liberal regime by recasting that rationale. According to Mill, industrial society moves toward stability, liberating citizens “for moral and intellectual productiveness”—“not an abatement of competition but the transference of competition to a higher social and perhaps moral plane.” He turns Hume’s scepticism on relativism itself. But he cannot entirely overcome relativism. Mill insists on “the ultimacy of truth, but not on its completeness or transcendence.” Dewey espouses a full-bodied historicism. He believes all human thought “provisional or circumstantial,” all ideas “plans of action.” He replaces liberalism with a centralized democratism or socialism dedicated to that vague notion, *growth*. But even growth is a mere hypothesis:

. . . postulating hypothetical values, none of which is choiceworthy in any definitive sense, can only lead to an infinite regression in regard to the choiceworthiness of any one of them. The fact of this infinite regression precludes the possibility of rational decision.

The very rationale of modern science, the ‘conquest of nature,’ becomes questionable in the writings of the philosopher who praises science as unreserv-

edly as any philosopher of modernity. Modern liberalism ends in, of all things, faith. The “attempt to rationalize matters which are not amenable to rationalization” yields “irrationalism.”

Given all this, why obey the demi-authorities of the liberal order? Liberals find it difficult to say. In his final chapter Parsons offers “reasons for civil obedience.” Distinguishing moral, civil, and political obligation as pertaining to family, non-constitutional law and legal procedures, and constitutional law, respectively, Parsons recalls liberalism’s sturdy political root; Americans could justify refusing political obedience only if “the American government could no longer protect most citizens by transforming their right of self-defense into public security.” Liberty should therefore be “understood as forbearance, not as license,” and freedom should be understood as “the search for excellence.” But if in modernity the “measure of differentiation” among men has “tended to be” wealth, not virtue, freedom understood as the search for excellence points beyond modern liberalism as understood by almost all of its proponents. Mill without historicism begins to resemble a student of Aristotle.